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HANDBOOK TO THE WORKS  
OF  
DANTE

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HANDBOOK TO THE WORKS  
OF  
DANTE

BY  
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AUTHOR OF "THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY," "THE AGE OF  
CHAUCER," "THE AGE OF TRANSITION," ETC. ETC.



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## PREFACE

THIS work is designed as an introduction to Dante's works in general, and the "Commedia" in particular. It has not been attempted to deal with the various writings in chronological sequence, partly because there is no sort of certainty on the point, and partly because it has been my object to take up the different subjects relating to and treated by Dante in the order most advantageous to the understanding of his artistic and philosophical development, beginning with the bare facts of his life, proceeding to his intellectual inheritance, and concluding with the triumph of his poetical powers in their full splendour.

Dante literature is so vast that no individual scholar can pretend to have read and digested it all, but I have sought to profit by the labours of distinguished contemporaries. At the same time I have made a special and independent study of Dante's writings, with which I have been familiar from early youth.

It should be pointed out that the references throughout are to the third edition of the excellent "Oxford Dante," while the translations, unless otherwise stated, are those of Longfellow.

F. J. SNELL.

TIVERTON,  
NORTH DEVON,  
*25th August, 1909.*

### CORRIGENDA

- On p. 74 *for* "Marseilles" *read* "Marseille."  
,, p. 124 *for* "Curatii" *read* "Curiatii."  
,, p. 140 *for* "Trèsor" *read* "Trésor."  
,, p. 226 *for* "Milanesi" *read* "Ed. Milanesi."



# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	v

## BOOK I

### OUTER LIFE AND LATIN WRITINGS

#### PART I

##### BIOGRAPHICAL

I. LIFE OF DANTE . . . . .	i
II. EPISTLES AND ECLOGUES . . . . .	29

#### PART II

##### ARTISTIC

I. DANTE'S PLACE IN LITERATURE . . . . .	69
II. THE DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA . . . . .	83

#### PART III

##### POLITICAL

I. THE DE MONARCHIA—PRELIMINARY . . . . .	117
II. THE DE MONARCHIA—THE ARGUMENT . . . . .	126
POSTSCRIPT . . . . .	139

## BOOK II

## INNER LIFE AND ITALIAN WRITINGS

## PART I

## MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE VITA NUOVA . . . . .	145
II. THE CANZONIERE . . . . .	191
III. THE CONVIVIO . . . . .	232

## PART II

## SPIRITUAL

I. THE COMMEDIA—MECHANISM . . . . .	271
II. THE COMMEDIA—PRINCIPLES AND SYM- BOLISM . . . . .	309

## EPILOGUE

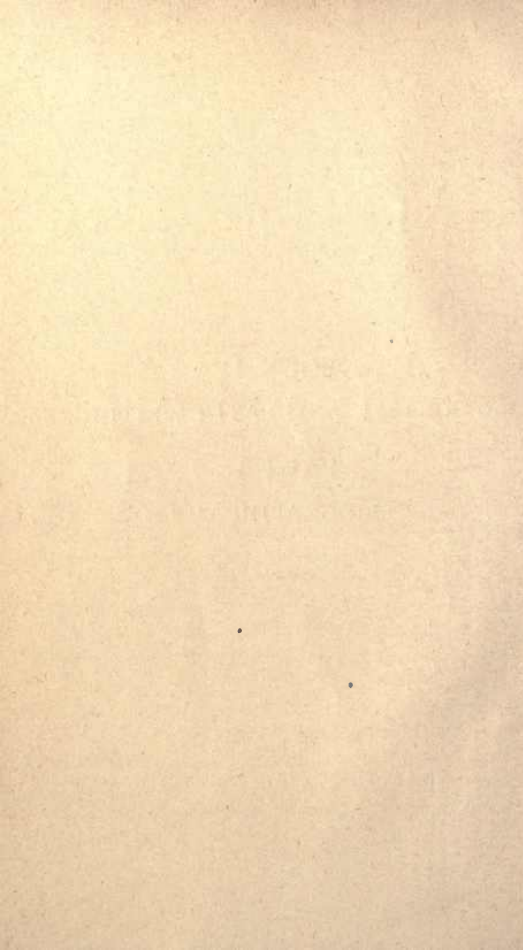
CHARACTERISTICS . . . . .	351
INDEX . . . . .	372

BOOK I

OUTER LIFE AND LATIN WRITINGS

PART I

BIOGRAPHICAL



# HANDBOOK TO DANTE

## CHAPTER I

### LIFE OF DANTE

“DANTE was not good company, and was not invited to dinner.” This remark of Emerson, applicable to the later, rather than the earlier, phases of the poet’s life, but more or less relevant to the whole, is eminently suggestive. If Dante had been of a sociable temperament, and less at odds with Fortune, much more that is authentic might have been recorded of him, and it is conceivable that he might have bequeathed, if not a complete autobiography, cheerful and copious accounts of his outward experiences. What he has actually left consists of little more than cryptic allusions to certain incidents of his youth and abundant evidence of his interest in the vivid politics, the scholastic learning, the art and literature of his time. The man has been, in a great measure, lost in the politician and the thinker. Dante, in fact, has observed too faithfully the formula, which he himself lays down, that it is not permitted to a writer to speak of himself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Convivio,” i, 2.

The period of Dante's life intellectually most fruitful was passed in exile and poverty; and well may Carlyle say of him: "An unimportant, wandering, sorrow-stricken man, not much note was taken of him while he lived; and most of that has vanished in the long space that now intervenes." Dante's loneliness was, in part, the fruit of distasteful opinions fearlessly avowed, but not entirely so. His elevated character manifested itself in silence and reserve, or in masterful self-assertion. His manners were not conciliating; he calls himself an *alma sdegnosa*, and such his countrymen found him. There can be no suspicion of prejudice in Villani's portrait: "This Dante, from his knowledge, was somewhat presumptuous, harsh and disdainful. Like an ungracious philosopher, he scarcely deigned to converse with laymen, but for his other virtues, science, and worth as a citizen, it seems but reasonable to give him perpetual remembrance in this our chronicle."

While Dante himself was conscious of his extraordinary powers, the men and women of his own generation had no adequate conception of his genius. It was only towards the close of his life, and perhaps not then, that his reputation became full-orbed. Meanwhile his peregrinations were incessant. For all these reasons the precise circumstances of his earthly pilgrimage are shrouded in mystery, and have given occasion to endless controversy and contradictions. When, too late, a sense of his greatness dawned on his repentant compatriots, homage was paid to his memory in a series of "romances" commencing with



Boccaccio's "Trattatello" and ending with Balbo's Life. Whether the neglect of former ages can be repaired by modern heroic research is doubtful. Scartazzini avers that in time a really scientific and possibly complete biography of Dante will be written, but he adds pathetically, "my eyes will certainly not behold it." Criticism in these last days has played havoc with much that our predecessors received as fact, and the tendency to depreciate Boccaccio's testimony is most marked. But this severe attitude towards Dante's illustrious panegyrist has not been universal, Witte, for example, being willing to concede far higher value to his evidence than is commonly accorded to it.

## I. BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

Dante (or Durante) Alighieri was born at Florence on some date between 18th May and 17th June, 1265. From his deep veneration for St. Lucia, who, it may be recollected, is a beneficent and influential personage in the "Commedia," it has been conjectured that he came into the world on her feast-day, 30th May. The homes of the Alighieri were situated in the quarter of the Porta San Piero, near the Piazza San Martino. They no longer remain, and the house indicated by the official tablet is not that in which Dante first saw the light. He was baptized at the church of "my beautiful St. John," as he calls it. Here also the ancestor, whom he regarded with most pride, "Christian and Cacciaguida became"; and Dante in his great poem pauses to record that he had

broken one of the stones of the ancient baptistery to save some one who was drowning.<sup>1</sup> At the close of his life he cherished a fond hope of receiving the laurel crown at his baptismal font.

Throughout his writings Dante preserves the most absolute silence concerning his parents and kindred with one remarkable exception. In the "Paradiso" he introduces the aforementioned Cacciaguida in a way that suggests that he was the source of whatever pretensions Dante may have had to nobility of birth:

I was thine own root.<sup>2</sup>

Cacciaguida had been knighted by the Emperor Conrad (1137-1152), and in 1147 accompanied that monarch on a crusade to the Holy Land, where the valiant Florentine was slain by the infidels. He had two brothers, Moronto and Eliseo, and a son Aldighiero, "from whom is named thy race," and who was Dante's great-grandsire. Cacciaguida further informs his descendant that his wife came to him from the Val di Pado, and that Dante's surname was derived from that place. Probably the lady was of Ferrara. Aldighiero had a son Bellincione, mentioned in old documents as a member of the Council and a *popolano*. Then came another Aldighiero, who seems to have been "a slight, unmeritable man," and is usually stated to have been a lawyer. He was Dante's father, and Forese Donati cast the circumstance in the poet's teeth:

Well know I thou wast Alighieri's son.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xix, 19-20.    <sup>2</sup> "Par." xv, 89.    <sup>3</sup> Son. LIV, 1.

The name now became the family cognomen. It is said to be of German origin, and to signify "ruler of the spear."<sup>1</sup> Strange that the names of the world's greatest poets should so nearly correspond!

Dante says of nobility:

There where appetite is not perverted,  
I say in Heaven, in thee I made my boast.<sup>2</sup>

In the face of this statement it may seem captious to raise doubts as to the standing of the family, but, in point of fact, there has been a good deal of discussion as to the worldly position of the Alighieri. Boccaccio declares that they were a branch of the Elisei—one of Cacciaguida's brothers was called Eliseo—and that the Elisei were descended from the Frangipani of Rome. This last touch may be a pure embellishment, but it would hardly have been added if the Elisei had not been eminently respectable. If Dante's immediate ancestors were considered Elisei, this would explain why they are not named in Villani's lists of exiled nobles. The general character of the evidence inclines one to think that Dante was what is commonly called a gentleman, notwithstanding the fact that, in accordance with the traditions of the poetical school to which he belonged, he declaimed against Frederick II's definition of nobility as "ancient riches and good manners." He appears to have had ample leisure in his youth for acquiring learning and engaging in the pleasant, but far from lucrative, pursuit of the Muse.

<sup>1</sup> Federn, "Dante and his Time," p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> "Par." xvi, 5-6.

## 2. EDUCATION

Dante tells us practically nothing about his childhood, except that, towards the close of his ninth year, he fell in love for the first time. By the time he was eighteen he taught himself the art of rhyming—an art in which most poets are self-schooled. As regards more ordinary accomplishments, we find that Dante was under some obligation to Brunetto Latini (or Latino), but it is difficult to believe that this distinguished writer and statesman was Dante's schoolmaster. However, it may have been so. Dante says to him:

In the world *from hour to hour*  
You taught me how a man becomes eternal.<sup>1</sup>

Villani describes Brunetto as "a very great master of rhetoric," and states that he moulded the Florentines into expert speakers. Rhetoric, which Dante calls "the sweetest of all the sciences," was concerned not so much with elocution as with composition and style, and examples were drawn from the great writers of antiquity, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Cicero, etc. Pupils were initiated into the whole art of expression from the nice choice of words to the construction of a pompous and well-balanced period, much as we find in the "De Vulgari Eloquentia." In imparting to Dante a sense of literary form Latini rendered him a priceless service—without it he might never have achieved the immortality which he foresaw was to be

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xv, 84-5.

his portion. But, before Dante could profit by such instruction, he had to acquire a knowledge of Latin—"grammar," as it was termed. Of this preliminary study he tells us no more than that he learnt Latin through the medium of Italian, and he expresses gratitude, not to any individual teacher, but to his mother-tongue, which certain sciolists were in the habit of disparaging.<sup>1</sup>

Dante lost his father in boyhood—possibly as early as 1270. His mother, a Donna Bella, had predeceased her husband, who had then married a lady named Lapa Cialuffi, and had issue a son Francesco, and a daughter (name unknown), who wedded one Leone Poggi. It is worth noting that Cialuffi and Poggi are both plebeian names. There is no evidence to show upon what terms Dante lived with his father's second family, but, bearing in mind the proverbial harshness of stepmothers, it would not be surprising if his childish years were somewhat clouded. As he speaks of Brunetto's "dear and kind *paternal* image," it is just possible that the latter stood *in loco parentis* to him, caring for his general interests and superintending his studies.

Brunetto was the author of a French encyclopaedia entitled "*Le Trésor*," and thus it seems probable that Dante was indebted to him, amongst other things, for his early acquaintance with North French and Provençal literature. If, as has been suspected, Dante's first sonnet, written in his eighteenth year, was suggested by a *planh* of Sordello, he would already have possessed

<sup>1</sup> "*Convivio*," i, 13.

some familiarity with the poetry of the Troubadours, as well as with that of the Italian *dicitori*, whose verdict he challenged.

From his statements in the "Convivio"<sup>1</sup> one would infer that until he was twenty-five he devoted himself to *belles lettres*, and cared little for philosophy and science, his study of which dated from that period. At some time in his life, however, he proceeded to the famous university of Bologna, and, although Boccaccio does not explain whether this was before or after Dante's exile, it would perhaps be more natural to understand by the allusion that the poet completed his education, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, at that seat of learning, and there acquired the seven liberal arts—grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Villani informs us that Dante visited Bologna and Paris *after* his exile from Florence, and there is little doubt that he went on "hiving knowledge" to the end of his days. It is not impossible that he resided at Bologna on two separate occasions—once in his youth, and subsequently in his mature manhood. There is nothing in his writings that would lead us to conclude that he ever left Florence for the purpose of obtaining instruction, but, in view of his colossal attainments, it is hard to believe that he did not undergo systematic training in his adolescence. This conclusion, however, is rather opposed to his own account in the "Convivio," which leaves the impression that, beyond a bare knowledge of Latin, he gained his store of erudition by his own

<sup>1</sup> ii, 13.



efforts and attendance at the disputations of the *filosofanti* at Florence, when he had lost Beatrice.<sup>1</sup> It is quite possible that Brunetto Latini was one of the lecturers, and that Dante's friendship with him was cemented, if it did not originate, when the poet was between twenty and thirty years of age. Still, there is an air of probability about Boccaccio's assertion that Dante learned various sciences, at various ages, and under various teachers. No great writer impresses us less as being self-taught.

### 3. FRIENDSHIPS

It is believed by some writers that Dante, when a young man, entered freely into the social pleasures of his native city. "We must imagine him," says Federn, "in the gay feasts of Florence, of which the chroniclers tell, with their baldechins and tribunes hung with wreaths of flowers, the great festival of St. John's Day, when the young men clad in white, led by the Signor d'Amore, went singing and dancing up the street of Santa Felicità, and women and girls also in wreaths of flowers partook of the festivities, and music and song and ringing bells filled the air with joyful sounds. It was still the time of fine chivalrous manners, the time of troubadours and of minstrelsy."<sup>2</sup> Dante, no doubt, witnessed such scenes, and, with his keen sense of the picturesque, must have appreciated their effectiveness.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on the "Vita Nuova," in which Dante's love for Beatrice—fair lady or phantom—is fully discussed.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 200.

But it may be questioned whether he shared in them. He was constitutionally studious and shy; and, in later life, he had a positive aversion for the bold manners of the Florentine ladies. Even in his youth he expressed a desire to exchange the riot of the city for the solitude of the wide ocean, in company with chosen friends.

Aloofness from the common concerns of life was characteristic of the school of poets to which Dante belonged, and, notably, of Guido Cavalcanti, its most eminent representative and Dante's chief friend. Boccaccio tells us that the gentlemen of Florence had a kind of convivial club, which met at their respective houses; and on one day of the year they used to ride "triumphantly" through the city, "performing tilts, tourneys, and other martial exercises." Persistent efforts were made to induce Cavalcanti to join this club, but without success.<sup>1</sup> If Dante took part in social functions of any kind, it is far from unlikely that he attended the dinners of this joyous fraternity. It is beyond a doubt that, after the death of Beatrice, he fell into evil courses, and had a boon companion in Forese Donati, a great glutton. Guido Cavalcanti, who had praised his maiden effort in poetical composition, admonished him for his temporary lapse in scathing terms:

I come to thee by daytime constantly,  
But in thy thoughts too much of baseness find;  
Greatly it grieves me for thy gentle mind  
And for thy many virtues gone from thee:

---

<sup>1</sup> "Decameron," vi, 9.

It was thy wont to shun much company,  
Unto all sorry concourse ill-inclined;  
And still thy speech of me heart-felt and kind  
Had made me treasure up thy poetry.  
But now I dare not, for thy abject life,  
Make manifest that I approve thy rhymes;  
Nor come I in such sort that thou may'st know.  
Oh! prythee, read this sonnet many times,  
So that that evil one who bred this strife  
Be thrust from thy dishonoured soul, and go.<sup>1</sup>

Cavalcante, Guido's father, is placed among the unbelievers in the "Inferno,"<sup>2</sup> and Guido himself was regarded as an atheist. Indeed, despite his pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, his scepticism may be considered proved. Among Dante's literary friends were Lapo Gianni and Cino of Pistoia, the latter of whom stood very high in Dante's esteem, and is constantly cited in the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" in conjunction with "his friend," *i.e.*, Dante himself. It may be observed, in passing, that Cino indited a sonnet on the death of Beatrice, and there is ample evidence that these poets formed a kind of brotherhood not devoid of that "vainglory" which Bacon discovered and condoned in noble intellects.

A musical acquaintance of Dante was Casella,

Whom he woo'd to sing  
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.<sup>3</sup>

The affectionate character of their meeting leaves no atom of doubt as to the reality of their friendship.

<sup>1</sup> Rossetti's tr.

<sup>2</sup> C. x.

<sup>3</sup> Milton, Sonnet to Mr. H. Lawes.

The same certainty cannot be felt in the case of the artist Giotto. Faith in Dante's acquaintanceship with him depends on a tradition preserved by Benvenuto da Imola, and others of a later date, but it is a tradition which the world will surrender very unwillingly, since it has some bearing on the genuineness of the portrait of the poet attributed to Giotto. It is reassuring that Kraus, who has gone fully into the subject, accepts the portrait as authentic, and believes that it was executed between 1334 and 1337—many years after Dante's decease.

#### 4. MILITARY SERVICE

On 11th June, 1289, the Florentines fought the *fuorusciti*, or banished Ghibellines, and their allies of Arezzo, in the plain of Campaldino, now a paradise of fruitful vines, and defeated them. Bruni states that, in one of his letters, Dante records that he was present at this combat, in the front ranks of the cavalry, and describes himself as being then "no child in arms." It is possible, therefore, that he took part in the operations of the previous year, when the same two cities were at war. In the August of 1289, or, according to Del Lungo, in 1290, the Pisan town of Caprona capitulated to the joint forces of Florence and Lucca; and, if Benvenuto may be believed, Dante was in this expedition also. Allusions to both the battle and the siege occur in the "Commedia,"<sup>1</sup> and Dante speaks as if he had been an eye-witness of the occurrences.

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." v, 22; "Inf." xxi, 95.

## 5. POLITICS AND MARRIAGE

The spirit of faction ran riot in the cities of Italy, and nowhere more than at Florence, in which, as in neighbouring communities, the inhabitants were divided into well-defined, historical parties, known as Guelfs and Ghibellines. In the broadest sense the former supported the Pope in his claim to theocratic government, and favoured democratic constitutions in the urban republics; the latter were adherents of the Emperor, and formed the aristocratic element in the municipalities. Dante's family was Guelf, and Dante himself remained a member of that party until after his banishment, when he substantially adopted the political creed of the Ghibellines. Guelf and Ghibeline are really disguised German names, the former representing Welf and the latter Waiblingen: and, originally, the rivalry the terms import lay between the House of Hohenstaufen and the Saxon Dukes of Bavaria. In Italy local feuds were often the true source and life of these divisions. The "*Commedia*" contains a number of allusions to Florentine history,<sup>1</sup> and Dante accepts the traditional account of the formation of the parties in his own city, tracing it to a quarrel between the Amidei and the Buondelmonti in the year 1215. As we shall see, Dante's exile was due to a reconstitution of the factions, or, it may be more correct to say, a split in the ranks of the victorious Guelfs, arising from a family difference that had nothing to do with high politics.

<sup>1</sup> See especially "*Par.*" xvi.

Dante's entrance into the stormy arena of public affairs is ascribed by Boccaccio to his marriage, which took place in the last decade of the thirteenth century, apparently about the year 1292. His bride was Gemma, daughter of Manetto Donati, who was a member of a family famous in the annals of Florence. The pair had four children, Pietro, Jacopo, Antonia, and Beatrice, though doubt has been entertained about the last, whilst some biographers say that there were seven children in all. Dante nowhere mentions his wife by name, and the character of their relations has been warmly debated. Boccaccio states that, after the separation necessitated by Dante's banishment, he had no wish for his wife's society; and this assertion has led to the conclusion that the fault was wholly or mainly on Gemma's side—that she was, in fact, a shrew. We learn, however, from the same authority, that she was a good mother and a careful housewife, and Dante's distinction as a poet is no guarantee that he was a model husband. Probably it was a marriage of convenience, not of affection, and is said, indeed, to have been arranged by Dante's relations as a remedy for his distress on account of the death of his first love.

Dante was twenty-eight years of age when the drastic reform of Giano della Bella was accomplished. The *grandi*, or nobles, of Florence were a turbulent class, and broke the peace of the city by frequent battles in the streets. In order to check their arrogance, Giano formulated certain "ordinances of justice," by which thirty-seven families were perpetually excluded from the *signoria* or government; and that the statute might

not be evaded, no one belonging to any of these families was permitted to abdicate his rank and descend to the level of an ordinary citizen. The execution of justice was confided to a Gonfalonier (standard-bearer), who was empowered to take summary action against noble offenders by attacking them with the militia, razing their houses, and haling them before the *podestà*, or chief magistrate—always a foreigner—to be punished according to their guilt.

The basis of the new constitution was the guilds, and only those who were enrolled in one or other of these trade unions were qualified to take part in public administration. On attaining the legal age of thirty, Dante was entered in one of the seven Greater Guilds—that of the physicians and apothecaries, in which artists were included. He was elected to the Council of the Podestà, and that of the Capitadini, or Heads of the Guilds; and in another council—that of the Hundred Men—we find him an active debater, opposing, perhaps, a grant of money to Charles the Cripple, King of Jerusalem and Apulia, in support of his campaign against the rebels of Sicily.

During his six years of service—from 1295 to 1301—Dante is credited with the performance of no fewer than fourteen separate embassies. This is a palpable exaggeration, contradicted by the ascertained fact that in the years when he is represented as journeying to Naples, Rome, Hungary, and France, he was almost continuously at Florence. It is known, however, that he went on a mission to the tiny republic of San Gimignano, in connection with the renewal of the



Guelfic League. This was in May, 1299. One homely piece of information is that he was chosen to superintend the repairs of Via di San Procolo,<sup>1</sup> which is a tribute to his versatility, and seems like a forecast of the engineering skill displayed in his construction of the Inferno.

From the middle of June to the middle of August, 1300, Dante was one of the six priors who constituted the *signoria*. His promotion to this office undoubtedly proves that he enjoyed the respect and confidence of his fellow citizens, but we must beware of attaching too much importance to the distinction. As the tenure of the magistracy was limited to two months, and it was shared with five colleagues, it is evident that many Florentines could boast the same honour. To Dante the preferment was the cause of most of his woes. The Ghibellines had been expelled or deposed, but the Florentine community was now divided into Bianchi and Neri (whites and blacks). The infection was imported from Pistoia, where the numerous descendants of one Messer Cancelliere, with their friends, formed hostile camps, calling themselves Cancellieri Bianchi and Cancellieri Neri respectively. The people of Pistoia invoked the mediation of the Florentines, who entered the city and relegated the furious partisans to the neighbourhood of Florence. The result of this ill-judged proceeding was that the Bianchi took refuge in the houses of their kinsmen the Cerchi, and the Neri in those of Frescobaldi, and the feud was extended to Florence.

<sup>1</sup> Now the Via de' Pandolfini.

This was the difficult situation with which the Priors were confronted in 1300, and they attempted a solution by banishing the chiefs of the Neri to the Castello della Pieve, and those of the Bianchi to Sarzana. Amongst the latter was Guido Cavalcanti, who, having sickened in the pestilential air of Sarzana, was permitted to return to Florence, where he soon died. It has been frequently cited as a notable instance of Dante's inflexible justice that he should have concurred in this treatment of his greatest friend, but the order of events as recorded by Villani renders it certain that Dante was no longer in office when this measure was adopted. Not unnaturally, the Ghibellines sought to make capital out of these troubles by promises of good government, and members of that party were creeping into public positions, to the no small alarm of the Guelf leaders.

For a time the Bianchi held the upper hand; their opponents were detected in a conspiracy, and the Neri chiefs, who had been allowed to return, were once more banished in June, 1301. In this same month Dante voted with the minority of the Council of the Hundred Men against furnishing troops to the Pope. Already he had been drawn into the vortex of faction and passed for a Bianco.

But it is time that we turned our attention to the actions of the Holy See, since Dante attributes his exile directly to Boniface VIII. During the poet's term of office as prior, the Pope despatched Cardinal Matteo d'Acquasparta to Florence with the title of peacemaker. Boniface had revived the pretensions of

his predecessors to universal jurisdiction, and when Albert of Habsburg had applied for the Pope's confirmation of his election as emperor, he had replied haughtily *Ego sum imperator*. It would seem also that the Pontiff laid special claim to Tuscany, as the former domain of the Countess Matilda, who, in 1175, had bequeathed her patrimonial estates to the Church.

On his arrival the Cardinal was received by the Florentines with acclamation, but soon their suspicions were aroused. "Those," says Villani, "of the White party, who directed the government of the country, from a fear of being deprived of their position and being deceived by the Pope and the Legate . . . would not obey; for which reason the said Legate was angered, returned to court, and left Florence excommunicated and under an interdict."<sup>1</sup> Dante, as one of the priors, was responsible for the disobedience to Papal authority, and became a marked man. Subsequent events tended to widen the breach. When the rest of the Neri returned to Florence, Corso Donati remained at Rome inflaming the Pope's mind against the Bianchi, whom he represented as little better than Ghibellines. Then came Dante's resolution, *quod de servitio faciendo domino papae nihil fiat*, which must have appeared to the Curia convincing proof of his contumacy.

## 6. EXILE

In 1301 the Pope, who was in secret league with the Neri, resolved to appoint a fresh peacemaker, and,

<sup>1</sup> viii, 40.

on 1st November, Charles of Valois, brother of Philip le Bel of France, entered Florence with an unarmed retinue. He had previously given a written assurance to the Priors that he would not act the part of a sovereign, but his peaceful professions were soon belied by the treacherous prince, who demanded large subsidies and stationed guards at the gates. Corso Donati, an ominous figure, rode into the city, attended by many friends, and a veritable panic ensued. The great bell was tolled, but there was no response to the summons, and the Priors, having resigned their offices, were succeeded by a *signoria* of the Neri party, who retaliated on their opponents in the most terrible fashion. Banishment, confiscation, and demolition of property were the order of the day.

A new *podestà*, Cante de' Gabrielli, of Agubbio fulminated a decree against Dante and four associates, in which they were sentenced to a fine of 5,000 gold florins for various crimes, such as fraud, peculation, bribery, and rebellion against the Pope and his Vicar. In default of payment within three days their possessions were to be forfeited and they were to be banished from the province of Tuscany for two years. Whether payment were made or not, they were declared incapable of ever holding any office under the Republic. This decree was dated 27th January, 1301-2. On 1st March another decree was issued, in which it was set out that, the accused having neither obeyed the summons nor paid the fine, their exile was made perpetual, and any of them who entered Florentine territory was condemned to be burnt alive. In 1311, and

again in 1315, the sentence of outlawry was confirmed, and twenty years after his death, Dante was still, to Florentine officialdom, a rebel and a peculator.

Dante constantly affirmed his innocence of the crimes laid to his charge, and till recent years his denial, combined with the testimony of all his biographers and the Guelf historian Villani, has seemed adequate disproof of the accusations levelled at him. Papa points out, however, that corruption was then almost universal, and Englishmen will naturally recall that the names of Bacon and Marlborough are sullied by dishonesty, proving that genius in itself is no safeguard against this particular weakness. Dante was overwhelmed with debt, and that would have made the temptation all the stronger. In one of his canzoni there is a passage which, in the opinion of some, amounts to a confession that he was not entirely free from blame.<sup>1</sup> Still, we should hesitate to construe it as an admission that he was justly condemned. The person who obtained possession of Dante's property was Boccaccio Adimari, whose violence and rapacity inspired the allusion to

The insolent race that like a dragon follows  
Whoever flees, and unto him that shows  
His teeth or purse is gentle as a lamb.<sup>2</sup>

Dante never forgave those who had been concerned in bringing about his exile. Boniface and Corso Donati, especially, were the objects of his vindictive hate, and as he could not punish them in any other

<sup>1</sup> Canz. 3, xx, 88-9.

<sup>2</sup> "Par." xvi, 115-7.

way, gloated over their misfortunes in this world and their imagined tortures in the next.

Dante's active career was now, to all intents and purposes, closed. For a time he co-operated with his fellow Bianchi and the Ghibellines, but ultimately conceived a disgust for both. In the "Paradiso"<sup>1</sup> he pillories a certain Lapo Salterello. Benvenuto says of this person that he was "a litigious and loquacious man, and very annoying to Dante during his exile." In the "Inferno,"<sup>2</sup> mention is made of one Camicion de Pazzi, a murderer, who tells Dante that he is waiting for Carlino to "exonerate" him, *i.e.* by his greater weight of iniquity. Carlino dei Pazzi, for a sum of money, surrendered to the Neri the fortress of Piano in Valdarno, which he was defending, with the result that many exiled Bianchi were captured and put to death. If these comrades are specimens of those with whom Dante was associated on the morrow of his banishment, it is no wonder that he formed a party by himself.

Dante's name appears in a document signed in the abbey church of San Gaudenzo, at the foot of the Alps, in which it was agreed to indemnify Ugolino di Felicione Ubaldini and his sons for any losses sustained through the operations against the Castello di Montaccianico. The document is undated, but some excellent authorities, including Del Lungo and Todeschini, assign it to the year 1302. There seems to be little doubt that Dante's meeting with the other fugitives at San Gaudenzo occurred on 8th June, 1302.

<sup>1</sup> xv, 128.

<sup>2</sup> xxxii, 68.

Bruni's account is that the exiles assembled at Gargonza, where they held many discussions, and finally established themselves at Arezzo, where they appointed Count Alessandro da Romena captain-general and elected a council of twelve, of whom Dante was one. They continued to hope against hope until 20th July, 1304, when they made a grand attack upon Florence, in which they were joined by allies from Arezzo, Bologna, and Pistoia. One of the gates was seized and part of the Florentine territory conquered, but the expedition proved fruitless, and Dante, in despair, betook himself to Verona, where he was received very courteously by the della Scala. In point of fact his withdrawal from the party took place somewhat earlier, since Bartolommeo della Scala, the "great Lombard" of the "Paradiso," died on 7th March, 1304. According to Bruni, whilst Dante was at Verona, he humbled himself to write frequent letters to members of the victorious party at Florence with a view to his recall. Other letters were addressed to the Florentine people, and among the rest a long epistle beginning *Popule mee, quid tibi feci?*

From Verona Dante may have proceeded to Bologna, as Villani records that he did at some time during his exile—in 1305?—for the purpose of study; and there he may have met Messer Fabbro, who receives honourable mention in the "Purgatorio."<sup>1</sup> In 1306 Dante was almost certainly at Padua, and in the October of that year he was in the Lunigiana, where he was employed by the Marchesi Malaspina to conclude a treaty

<sup>1</sup> xiv, 100.



with the Bishop of Luni. Dante's visit to Guido Salvatico in the Casentino, of which Boccaccio speaks, appears to have occurred in 1307. It may be noted that Manentessa, the wife of that nobleman, who seconded her husband's hospitality to the wandering poet, was a daughter of Buonconte of Montefeltro.<sup>1</sup> Whilst there, he is supposed to have written the letter to Moroello Malaspina, together with the accompanying poem, in which he owns to a passion for an Alpine beauty, who, according to the Anonimo Fiorentino, was of Pratovecchio.

There is reason to think that in 1308 Dante was at Forlì, acting as secretary to Scarpetta degli Ordellaffi. Flavio Biondo, the historian of the place, affirms that letters dictated by Dante were still to be seen in his time. (Flavio died in 1463.) One Messer Marchese, a tippler of Forlì, is mentioned in a passage of the "Purgatorio,"<sup>2</sup> that possesses biographical value; and there are other references to the neighbourhood—notably in the sixteenth canto of the "Inferno," where Dante paints a vivid picture of a waterfall.

Both Villani and Boccaccio assert that Dante travelled to Paris, and the latter adds that he triumphantly disputed against the ablest scholars in the theological school of the university. Some latter-day critics of unquestioned eminence have been inclined to scout this account of a visit to France, believing it to be a legend based on Dante's theological knowledge, which he might easily have acquired elsewhere. In so far as the story depends on the allusion to Sigier and the

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." v.

<sup>2</sup> xxiv, 31.

Rue du Fouarre in the tenth Canto of the "Paradiso," it may be frankly admitted that the evidence is worth little or nothing. The Rue du Fouarre (Street of the Straw) was the Quartier Latin of the Middle Ages, and as for Sigier (or Siger, as the name should be spelled), Dante might have heard enough of that unlucky champion of freedom without going beyond the limits of the peninsula. The tradition that Dante studied at Oxford, to which Gladstone, Plumptre, and other English enthusiasts have clung, is utterly improbable, but Villani's testimony regarding the poet's residence in Paris is not to be lightly laid aside. If this chapter in his life be real, it must be allotted to the year 1309.

In the twenty-fourth Canto of the "Purgatorio," Dante refers to a stay at Lucca, and a scandal that arose out of a friendship between himself and a young lady of the place. Gaspary suggests that this occurred between 1307 and 1310, but in those days Lucca was an ally of Florence. From June, 1314, to April, 1316, Ugucione della Faggiuola was tyrant of the town, and then Dante would have been safer. Dante's son, Pietro, adopted the view that the affair in question was a guilty *liaison*,<sup>1</sup> but Buti, a fourteenth-century commentator, states that "he formed an attachment to a gentle lady called Madonna Gentucca, of the family of Rossimpelo, on account of her great virtue and modesty, and not with any other love."

In 1310, the Emperor Henry VII arrived in Italy, and Dante trusted that the two objects on which he

<sup>1</sup> See Scheffer-Boichorst, "Aus Dante's Verbannung," pp. 216-8.

had set his heart—the restoration of Imperial ascendancy and his own return to Florence—were in a fair way of fulfilment. If the epistle to the Emperor is genuine, the poet paid his court to the monarch, and sought to promote the success of the expedition by advising him to raise the siege of Brescia. Henry entered Rome, where he was crowned by the Papal legates, and he then proceeded to invest Florence. Dante's heart must have beat high at the news, but poet and emperor were both doomed to disappointment. Florence was not captured. Worse was to follow. Henry was on the march to attack King Robert of Naples, when, on 23rd August, 1313, he suddenly expired at Buonconvento. It was expected that Frederick of Aragon would assume the leadership of the Ghibelline cause, but that prince retired to Sicily, and refused to intervene in Italian affairs. Accordingly, Dante has never a good word to say of him. Very different is his attitude towards Can Grande della Scala, who was elected captain of the Ghibelline league in 1318, and from whom the poet anticipated great—indeed, the greatest—things.

During the last years of his life Dante fixed his headquarters at the court of Guido Novello da Polenta at Ravenna. Thither, if his letter to that nobleman is authentic, he must have repaired as early as 1313, but this circumstance does not preclude one or several visits to Can Grande at Verona, and the anecdotes recorded by Petrarch, and quoted by Balbo in his *Life of Dante*,<sup>1</sup> almost necessitate this conclusion.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Bunbury's tr. ii, 207.

## 7. DEATH AND BURIAL

Guido Novello, a nephew of Francesca da Rimini, the fair sinner compassionated by Dante in the "Inferno,"<sup>1</sup> employed him as an ambassador to Venice, for the purpose of staving off the war with which he was threatened by that republic and Forlì. On his way back, Dante was seized by mortal sickness, and died at Ravenna on the night of 13th September, 1321. He was buried with great honour at the Church of St. Peter (now the Chiesa di San Francesco), and it was intended by Guido Novello to erect a sumptuous tomb to his memory. Soon afterwards, however, Dante's patron and admirer was driven from Ravenna, and thus the project was defeated, but in 1483, Bernardo Bembo, father of the celebrated cardinal, gave effect to the design by commissioning a superb monument.

Dante's life is a *torso*—in all outer respects broken and incomplete, but throughout he kept his eyes steadily fixed on the prize of poetical immortality, symbolized, perhaps, by the constant stars, with the mention of which each cantica of the "Commedia" closes. Accomplished amidst wretchedness, weariness, exile, perpetual disappointment, and ill-relished dependence, the Sacred Poem is a perfect and inspiring example of moral courage and intellectual pains. *Sic itur ad astra.*

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." v.

## CHAPTER II

### EPISTLES AND ECLOGUES

#### I. GENERAL

**I**N the preceding chapter reference has been made to Dante's letters—always in a cautious and hesitating tone, such as befits the general uncertainty of the subject. These letters relate to the historical aspects of Dante's career, and therefore with the facts or probabilities fresh in our minds, we may well proceed to consider the epistles and eclogues before bestowing attention on those compositions which are unquestionably genuine, and on which his great reputation so securely depends.

As Mr. Gardner observes, the point of departure for any such study is Villani's rubric:

“Amongst others he wrote three noble epistles. One he sent to the Florentine government, complaining of his unmerited exile. Another to the Emperor Henry, when he was at the siege of Brescia, chiding him for his delay and almost prophesying. The third to the cardinals of Italy, when there was the vacancy after the death of Pope Clement, in order that they might agree in choosing an Italian pope. All in Latin with lofty diction and with excellent sentences and author-

ities, which were much commended by the wise and understanding.”<sup>1</sup>

Next we have Dante's statement in “Vita Nuova”<sup>2</sup> that, after the death of his lady, he wrote to the princes of the country regarding its state, taking for commencement the words of the prophet Jeremiah: *Quomodo sedet sola civitas!* It is worthy of remark that the letter addressed to the cardinals of Italy in 1314, supposing the extant epistle to be genuine, begins with those words. The latter is, of course, not to be confounded with that mentioned in the “Vita Nuova,” which would have been composed many years previously. Another matter for observation is that the second and third books of the “De Monarchia,” which may be described as an epistle on a grand scale, are introduced with quotations from the Old Testament, proving that Dante had a predilection for this ecclesiastical sort of preface. It may be added that the practice, on the part of distinguished writers, of addressing governments and communities, may be traced, as far as Italy is concerned, to the example of Guittone of Arezzo, who wrote more than one epistle to the Florentines, the most interesting being the fourteenth letter, which refers to the battle of Montaperto.

Returning to Dante, Cecco d'Ascoli, an eccentric contemporary, claims to have received a letter from him when the poet was at Ravenna;<sup>3</sup> and Boccaccio asserts that Dante wrote many letters in prose, a number of which were still to be seen. Bruni speaks

<sup>1</sup> ix, 136.

<sup>2</sup> § XXXI.

<sup>3</sup> “Acerba,” ii, 12.

of several letters, one of which must have corresponded, with respect to its tenor, to Epistle VI in the "Oxford Dante." In another the poet is said to have stated his unwillingness to take part in the siege of Florence. Bruni not only cites Dante's letters, but describes his handwriting, which, he informs us, was thin, long, and very correct, as he could testify from personal inspection. If the biographer reproduces the *ipsissima verba* of the letters from which he culls, some of them must have been in Italian. It is more likely, however, that he translated from Latin originals, Dante not having emancipated himself from the trammels of mediaeval custom in this particular. A letter to Guido da Polenta is in Italian, but it is almost universally rejected as a clumsy forgery, and is not to be found in the Oxford edition of Dante's works. Still, it must not be forgotten that Dante was one of the greatest of innovators in the use of the vernacular, differing in that respect from Petrarch, who was also a voluminous letter-writer.

The "Oxford Dante" contains ten letters, all of which are at least discussible. The general attitude towards the Dantesque letters is questioning, and the views that have been put forward represent various degrees of scepticism. Imbriani<sup>1</sup> will not allow that any of them are genuine, and Scartazzini,<sup>2</sup> though he would fain grant that three or four are what they profess, arrives at the reluctant conclusion that not one of them is beyond reasonable doubt. With others it is a matter of picking and choosing, letters being pro-

<sup>1</sup> "Propugn." xiii, 2<sup>o</sup>, 229-33.

<sup>2</sup> "Dantologia," p. 341.



nounced genuine or spurious in accordance with purely subjective canons of criticism. Mr. Edmund G. Gardner has devoted a valuable essay to the topic of Dante's letters, and in the face of the desolating scepticism which leaves hardly one stone upon another, his verdict possesses uncommon interest. He decides that "setting aside the letters to Cino da Pistoia and to Moroello Malaspina, which are usually rejected as spurious . . . the probability in favour of the genuineness of the Epistles to the Princes and People, to the Florentines, to the Emperor, and to the Italian Cardinals, together with the two Eclogues, is so strong as almost to amount to certitude; and the arguments against the Letter to the Florentine friend, and the Epistle to Can Grande seem to me decidedly the reverse of conclusive."<sup>1</sup> He concedes the possibility that the Epistles to the Emperor and to the Cardinals are fourteenth-century forgeries based on Villani's statement and concocted for political purposes, but in disproof of this suggestion, he appeals to the internal evidence of the letters, which, if they are spurious, reveal a striking acquaintance with Dante's modes of thought, when tested by corresponding passages in the "*Commedia*." The question is, therefore, whether these are not undesigned coincidences due to common authorship. On this point it need only be observed that the rigid application of this principle might carry Mr. Gardner farther than he might be willing to go, as it is easy to indicate similarities of language and sentiment between letters which he accounts genuine, and

<sup>1</sup> Dante's "*Ten Heavens*," p. 296.

those that he excludes. Close investigation will bring to light links of connection, in the shape of words and phrases, which might set before us the choice of accepting or rejecting practically the whole collection. As regards the letter to Moroello Malaspina, which is especially an object of suspicion, it contains expressions parallel to some contained in Canzone XI.

Until late in the eighteenth century only one letter of Dante was known to exist—that to Can Grande (X). Translations of those to the Princes and People of Italy and the Emperor—considered to be the work of Marsilio Ficino—were available also, and that was all. The first addition to this scanty store was made by Dionisi, who published Epistle IX. In 1827 Witte printed the original of the letter to the Emperor (VII), the letter to the Italian Cardinals (VIII), and that to Cino of Pistoia (IV). Continuing his researches, he discovered among the MSS. presented to Gregory XV by Maximilian of Bavaria in 1622 a number of other letters attributed to Dante, including I, II, III, V, and VI in the “Oxford Dante.” There were three more letters written in the name of the Countess G. of Battifolle to the Empress Margaret of Brabant, wife of Henry VII, which Witte<sup>1</sup> judged from internal evidence to have been Dante’s compositions, but this opinion has received little support from the generality of scholars. We will now proceed to consider the ten epistles of our text in order—which, as far as can be ascertained, is the chronological order.

<sup>1</sup> “Essays on Dante,” Lawrence and Wicksteed’s tr., p. 221.

## 2. EPISTLES I AND II

Epistles I and II date from that comparatively early period of Dante's exile, when, according to Bruni, Bianchi and Ghibellines ranged themselves under the command of Count Alessandro da Romena, and elected a council of twelve for managing the affairs of the party, Dante being one. It has been suspected that Alessandro and the council are both mythical, since neither Villani nor any other contemporary seems to have known anything of them. They are named, however, in the inscription of Epistle I, which, if it is not a downright forgery, affords valuable confirmation of Bruni's account. It will be observed that from the first word to the last there is nothing to indicate that Dante was concerned in the production, and Del Lungo maintains that it was written after the attempt of the exiles to storm Florence, when Dante had severed his connection with the party. The same writer affirms his belief that the document is genuine in the sense that it was drawn up at the time—in other words, that it is the serious official communication that it purports to be; and few persons, on a careful perusal of its contents, will find reason for denying this character to it.

Although it is considered most improbable that Dante had anything to do with its production, a brief note on the circumstances in which it was composed will not be out of place. Early in 1304 Cardinal Nicholas of Ostia was despatched by the new pope,

Benedict IX, on a mission of peace to Tuscany, the Maremma, and Romagna. Forged letters created the impression that he unduly favoured the Bianchi; and on 8th May, when he attempted to enter Florence for the second time, admission was refused. This letter appears to have been written some time in March from the valley of the Upper Arno, and is couched in a strain of confident anticipation and reverent submission, very different from what we should have expected in view of the hostile relations between the leaders of the Bianchi and the Papacy before the expulsion of the former from Florence, and the external fortunes of the party subsequently. The letter renders it evident that the Cardinal, in his desire to placate the Bianchi, had conceded too much. A certain Friar B. had been sent to the exiles with a promise of restoring them to their civic rights and giving back the laws and institutions to which they were attached. In return, the author or authors of the epistle express warm gratitude and filial obedience to the Cardinal, who, however, had undertaken more than he was able to perform.

Epistle II is interesting for various reasons. As in the case of Epistle I, we are not obliged to regard the letter as either Dante's or a later forgery. It may be a genuine epistle written by somebody else. One stumbling-block in the way of believing that Dante was the author, is the startling contrast between the tone of this letter and the allusion to the House of Romena in the thirtieth canto of the "*Inferno*." This argument, however, is not conclusive, since we find another Alexander of more historical importance,

praised for his liberality in the "Convivio,"<sup>1</sup> and yet assigned to the circle of Hell in which tyrants expiate their inhumanity.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Dante does not spare his best friends, to whom he acknowledges his indebtedness.

But there is a suspicion that Alessandro da Romena, captain of the Bianchi, is a figment. The passage in the "Inferno,"<sup>3</sup> which is supported by historical evidence, proves that there was an Alessandro, who, according to Passerini and Troya, was the son or brother of Guido Pace,<sup>4</sup> but the latter authority does not identify him with the Alessandro who is said to have commanded the exiles, and of whom, in that case, mention occurs only in Bruni's "Life of Dante," and in this letter. If there were two of the name then living, apart from the future Bishop of Urbino, who would have been a boy, the general of the Bianchi was nephew of the other. Passerini guesses that the Alessandro, whom he makes the eldest son of Guido Pace, and Troya represents as his brother, died in 1305, and Troya's later opinion was that Alessandro, the third son of Guido Pace, died in that year. Altogether it is a fine tangle, which can only be understood by means of genealogical tables, but in this, at any rate, we have a point of agreement that an Alessandro da Romena died in 1305, if, that is to say, the views of the rival heralds are worth anything at all. Provisionally, then, we may accept 1305 as the date of the present letter.

<sup>1</sup> iv, 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Inf." xii, 107.

<sup>3</sup> xxx, 77.

<sup>4</sup> Witte, *op. cit.* p. 182.

As to whether the epistle is Dante's, there is not much to show, but, if we accept it as a genuine letter of the period, it is quite probable that he wrote it. One cannot but be struck with the expression *exul immeritus*, which figures in the inscriptions of Epistles V, VI, and VII, and seems to have been adopted by Dante as a standing description. Again, the plea of poverty which he advances in the conclusion as an excuse for not attending the funeral of his illustrious comrade, will naturally remind us of the famous passage in the "Convivio,"<sup>1</sup> in which he deplores his miserable lot. The grand manner is also rather indicative of Dantesque origin.

### 3. EPISTLE III

Epistle III is remarkable both for its contents and the person to whom it is addressed. The topic with which it deals is a sudden and violent attack of love which has constrained the writer to break his good resolution not again to meddle with frivolous themes, but to make study his constant occupation. Accompanying the letter was a copy of a poem which has been identified with Canzone XI, in the fifth stanza of which the lightnings, if not the thunders, of passion are similarly recorded. It has been considered extraordinary that Dante should have confided these sentiments to Moroello Malaspina, who had been commander of the Neri army that inflicted a crushing

<sup>1</sup> i, 3.

defeat on the Bianchi at Serravalle in 1302,<sup>1</sup> and, having conquered Pistoia for Florence and Lucca, had governed it as Capitano del Popolo. On the other hand, it must be remembered that, assuming this letter to have been written in 1307, some years had elapsed since Dante had renounced all connection with the Bianchi as a party, and he had been intimately associated with members of the Malaspina family. Dante praises Alagia, Moroello's wife, in the nineteenth canto of the "Purgatorio";<sup>2</sup> and in the same *cantica* he does not scruple to refer to an equivocal friendship with a lady of Lucca. The simile, in which he likens Love to an exile returning to his own country, with all the severity which usually marked *coups d'état* in the city-republics, is most natural in the circumstances, and the phrase *pulsus a patria* has already occurred in Epistle II. It may also be noted that the expression *praesentis oratiunculae seriem* resembles *vestrarum litterarum seriem* in Epistle I, pointing to community of origin or imitation.

#### 4. EPISTLE IV

Epistle IV, addressed to Cino of Pistoia, is a fitting sequel to the foregoing, treating as it does of the philosophy of love. In the previous letter Dante (if Dante was the author) owns to a new attachment; here the point on which Cino is supposed to have consulted him is whether, and in what way, the soul can be transformed from one passion to another.

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xxiv, 148.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 42-44.



Dante decides that, while a passion may die, the faculty of desire, which is the seat of love, is reserved for further activity. He specifies Ovid's "*De Rerum Transformatione*," and Seneca's "*Remedia Amoris*,"<sup>1</sup> as authoritative works, which his correspondent will do well to peruse; and he seems to have appended a versified discourse of his own, conjectured to be either Sonnet XXXVI of the "Oxford Dante," or Canzone I of the "Convivio." It should be pointed out that Sonnet XXXIV also, in which Dante taxes Cino, in reply to a sonnet received from him, with a dubious facility in transferring his affections, though contradictory in tone, belongs to the same cycle of compositions in respect of its subject.

If we could be sure that the first four letters are genuine, they might be grouped as a single family, dating from the period between Dante's banishment and the advent of the Emperor Henry, and linked each to each by verbal affinities or identity of plan, such as the subjoining of a poem. The hyperbolical note discovered in the preceding epistles reappears in the fourth, the commencement of which is positively volcanic.

#### 5. LETTER OF FRATE ILARIO

Before proceeding to discuss the remainder of the epistles, it will be expedient to touch upon an effusion which is not found in the "Oxford Dante." Obviously, for it neither is nor purports to be a composition of

<sup>1</sup> Apocryphal; Dante cites it, "Conv." iii, 8; "De Mon." ii, 8.

the poet, though it is associated with his real or pretended letters in the Laurentian codex, an autograph of Boccaccio's. We allude to the famous letter of Frate Ilario. Scartazzini ridicules its pretensions, and, regarding it as so much fooling, takes occasion to make an excellent pun by dubbing it a *preziosa ilarità*.<sup>1</sup> Scheffer-Boichorst<sup>2</sup> was at one time strongly inclined to accept it as genuine; and very few readers will feel anything but regret at the sacrifice of the dramatic incident it relates as having occurred in the Convent of Santa Croce del Corvo in the Lunigiana. "Hither he came, passing through the diocese of Luni, moved either by the religion of the place or by some other feeling. And seeing him, as yet unknown to me and to all my brethren, I questioned him of his wishings and seekings there. He moved not, but stood silently contemplating the columns and arches of the cloister. And again I asked him what he wished, and whom he sought. Then slowly turning his head and looking at the friars and at me, he answered, 'Peace!'"

Unfortunately, the genuineness of an Epistle is not to be determined by the mere desire that it may be authentic. To this point we shall have to recur in a later section.<sup>3</sup> Here, however, it may be recalled that Dante was undoubtedly in the Lunigiana in 1306, to which year Scheffer-Boichorst assigned the letter. It is addressed to Uguccone della Faggiuola, and conveys the information that Dante proposed to dedicate

<sup>1</sup> "Dantologia," p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> Aus Dante's Verb. pp. 151 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> Book II, Pt. II, Ch. i.

the first part of the "Commedia" to that eminent man, and the succeeding portions to Moroello Malaspina and Frederick of Sicily respectively. The mention of Moroello Malaspina brings the letter into relation with Epistle III, but it cannot have been written so early as 1306, as it refers to the death of Corso Donati, which had not then taken place.

## 6. EPISTLE V

We now come to what may be termed, relatively to the letters already dealt with, the first of the canonical Epistles—that to the Princes and People of Italy. Epistle V presents some notable variations from the style of its predecessors, more particularly in the lavish use of quotations from Scripture, and illustrates what Villani meant by the expression *quasi profetizzando*. The letter has all the ring of true and profound conviction, and is precisely the sort of message that one can imagine the "blameless exile" penning and sending forth to his countrymen on the eve of the visitation of the Emperor Henry, which he fondly hoped would inaugurate a new and golden age both for himself and those of his compatriots who followed the path of duty. Throughout the letter he appeals to the religious sense of Italians, and nothing could be more impressive and, one may say, inspired, than the divine elation that informs the opening sentences: "'Behold, now is the accepted time,' wherein arise signs of consolation and of peace. For a new day shineth, displaying a dawn which already dissipates the shades

of long-continued calamity. Already the Eastern breezes thicken; the sky reddens and comforts with caressing calm the forebodings of the nations. And we shall see our looked-for joy—we who have long spent the night in the wilderness, inasmuch as there shall rise up the pacific Titan, and Justice, dulled even as the heliotrope without the sun, shall again flourish, what time he shall have brandished his glory. In the light of his rays all they that hunger and thirst shall be satisfied, and they that love iniquity shall be confounded. For the mighty Lion of the Tribe of Judah has erected his merciful ears, and, pitying the lamentation of universal captivity, has raised up another Moses, who shall deliver his people from the burdens of the Egyptians and lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey.

“Rejoice, Italy, thou which art now to be pitied even of the Saracens, but presently will appear everywhere enviable, seeing that thy spouse, the solace of the world and the glory of thy people, Henry most clement, Divus Augustus and Caesar, hastens to thy nuptials. Dry thy tears and wipe out the tokens of thy mourning, fairest, for he is at hand that shall set thee free from the prison of the ungodly, who, smiting them that have ill-will, shall destroy them with the edge of the sword, and let out his vineyard to others, who shall render the fruits of righteousness in the time of harvest.”

No one who has the least acquaintance with Holy Scripture can fail to be struck with the repeated echoes of consecrated phrases translated to a political con-

text. This characteristic is carried to such an extreme as to fashion the pamphlet into a homily on the Divine Right of Emperors. Henry's Italian subjects are depicted as children in need of wholesome discipline, and while Dante lays stress on the lovingkindness of the Sublime Eagle, he holds out small hope for such as resist and kick against the pricks. They are to be pursued even unto Thessaly—the Thessaly of final destruction. This is, of course, an allusion to the battle of Pharsalia. When Dante suspends for a moment the battery of Biblical reminiscences, it is that he may have recourse to the armoury of Greek and Latin history. The argumentative portion of the letter is based on the assertion of a bifurcation of authority as between Peter and Caesar and the assumption that Henry of Luxemburg has inherited all the rights and privileges of the ancient Roman Emperors. Dante adduces as a proof the peace in which the whole world had been lapped for the past twelve years. Properly to appreciate the force of this reasoning, one must call to mind the use of a similar phenomenon at the time of the birth of Christ in his "De Monarchia," in which his views of the relations between Church and State are more fully elaborated. This epistle was apparently written before the treatise since the conclusion of the letter tacitly acquiesces in the notion, combated in the "De Monarchia,"<sup>1</sup> that the Pope is to the Emperor as is the Sun to the Moon. "This is he whom Peter, the Vicar of God, bids us honour, whom Clement, now Peter's successor, lightens

<sup>1</sup> iii. 4.

with the light of Apostolic benediction, that where the spiritual ray suffices not, there the brightness of the lesser luminary may give light."

Lastly, it may be worth while to direct attention to the passage of the letter in which the word "heliotrope" occurs. The term "Titan," as applied to the sun, is easily explicable, being in accordance with classical usage, although the term would be more strictly applied to Hyperion, the father of Helios or Sol. Most people, however, would never suspect in reading the passage that the term "heliotrope" meant anything but the plant. It is possible that it signifies the winter's solstice, and Mr. Latham so renders it. ("Titan shall arise pacific, and justice, which had languished without sunshine at the end of the winter's solstice, shall grow green once more, when first he darts forth his splendour.") Dr. Paget Toynbee suggests a third, and highly interesting interpretation—"that Dante is here referring to one of the well-known (legendary) properties of the precious stone called *heliotropium*, which, when placed in water, had the power of altering or dimming the sun."<sup>1</sup> On the whole, it is most likely that Dante alludes to the plant, since in Sonnet XXXIX he refers to the story of Clytie who was transformed by Apollo into a vegetable, not a mineral, heliotrope. Uguccione da Pisa, whose work "De Derivationibus Verborum" is cited in the fourth book of the "Convivio,"<sup>2</sup> defines *heliotropium* as *quaedam herba*, and speaks of its property of turning to the sun.

<sup>1</sup> "Studies and Researches," 267-9.

<sup>2</sup> C. 6.

This letter must have been written after the Emperor's first coronation, and before he entered Italy on 10th October, 1310.

### 7. EPISTLE VI

Epistle VI is a vehement reproof of "the most wicked Florentines within." Unlike the remainder of the letters, this and the following epistle are dated, and dated in such a way as shows that Dante had considerable confidence in the future, since he makes an epoch of what he terms "the most auspicious march of the Emperor Henry to Italy." The post-script of Epistle VI conveys that it was written on the borders of Tuscany, near the sources of the Arno, 31st March, 1311. The letter was known to Bruni, who manifestly refers to it in the passage:

"Now while he was thus hoping for a return by way of pardon, the election of Henry of Luxemburg as Emperor took place; and first his election and then his expedition threw all Italy into a fever of expectation. Whereupon Dante could not hold his purpose of awaiting grace, but, exalting himself with disdainful mind, began to revile them who were in possession of the city, calling them infamous and evil, and threatening them with the punishment that they deserved at the hands of the Emperor, from which, he said, it was evident they could not escape."

The letter opens with a restatement of principles. The Roman Empire is of divine appointment, the purpose being to ensure general tranquillity and



civilization. Italy, tossed by wind and waves, is a wretched example of anarchy, due to the want of a lawful ruler. This is particularly the case with the Florentines, who have risen in mad rebellion against the Roman prince, the king of the world, God's minister. Accordingly, Dante launches the most terrible denunciations against them. After ridiculing the power of their walls to keep Henry at bay—a judgment falsified by the event—he draws a lurid picture of coming doom. They will see their luxurious abodes falling under the strokes of the battering-ram, or consumed with fire. The famished populace will clamour wildly. The churches, thronged day after day with a crowd of matrons, will be the prey of the spoiler, while wondering innocents will expiate the misdeeds of their fathers. Dante will not suffer the criminals to derive comfort from the pages of history. They are not to expect the good fortune that befell the men of Parma, who surprised Vittoria, the head-quarters of Frederick II; rather let them call to mind the punishment meted out by an earlier Frederick, *i.e.*, Barbarossa—to Milan and Spoleto. Their fate will resemble that of heroic Saguntum, with the important difference that the sufferings endured by that glorious place were borne for the cause of liberty, while the disasters awaiting Florence will be incurred in shameful wise for the sake of slavery. The passage<sup>1</sup> in which Dante insists that the Florentines are actually in a state of bondage and that true freedom can only be enjoyed under the Empire should be compared

<sup>1</sup> § 5.

with the "De Monarchia," in which he assigns reasons for this apparent paradox. The charge that the citizens, relying on prescriptive right, have refused the duty of submission and risen to the madness of rebellion seems specifically to refer to the offer of imperial mediation in the affair of Arezzo, July, 1310.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of Epistle VI Dante calls the German prince *triumphator*, and the compliment is repeated in the inscription of Epistle VII, notwithstanding that in this letter impatience is expressed at the slowness of the military operations. At the date of its composition—14th April, 1311—Dante was still in the same place, near the source of the Arno, and it has been conjectured that he was residing at the court of Guido Salvatico (second cousin of Alessandro da Romena), whose wife has been identified with the Countess G. of Battifolle, the correspondent of the Empress Margaret. The latest of the three letters written in her name is dated from Poppi in the upper valley of the Arno, 18th May, 1311.

### 8. EPISTLE VII

Epistle VII is addressed to the Emperor, and overflows with rapturous loyalty, which barely stops short of elevating the monarch to the level of Christ. The preceding letter claims that the words of Isaiah, "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," have a secondary reference to Henry, who had undertaken an arduous task for the benefit of Italy.

<sup>1</sup> Villani, viii, 120.

Epistle VII goes a step farther, bursting out into such language as this: "I beheld thy most benign countenance and heard thy most merciful voice, when my hands handled thy feet and my lips paid that which was due. Then my spirit exulted in thee, and silently I said to myself: 'Behold the Lamb of God; behold him that taketh away the sins of the world.'"

As has been intimated, Dante is not quite satisfied with the new redeemer, who seems lax in achieving the objects of the expedition. Thus he had been driven to exclaim with John the Baptist: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" In order to stimulate the prince to increased activity, he quotes with evident approval Curio's speech to Caesar in Lucan's "Pharsalia," although we meet with the tribune in the twenty-eighth canto of the "Inferno,"<sup>1</sup> punished as a sedition-monger.

O how bewildered unto me appeared,  
With tongue asunder in his windpipe slit,  
Curio, who in speaking was so bold!

Dante, more audacious still, urges the Emperor to destroy Florence root and branch. The Lord has anointed him that he may smite Amalek and kill Agag. Like Hercules, he has to discover a way of slaying this Hydra. In vituperating Florence, Dante exhausts his magazine of abuse. She is successively a stinking vixen, a viper, a sick flock, a Myrrha, an Amata. Away with her! In a memorable passage of the "Inferno"<sup>2</sup> the Ghibelline Farinata is praised, by

<sup>1</sup> ll. 100-2.

<sup>2</sup> x, 73-93.

implication, for having alone withstood a similar proposal. These inconsistencies do not suffice to upset the authenticity of the letter, which is one of those most generally accepted. "Circumstances alter cases," and Dante's point of view is naturally affected by his immediate aims and the feelings of the moment.

It will be recollected that Villani particularly refers to three letters of Dante's, one of them being an epistle to the Emperor, "reproving him for his delay," *i.e.* in besieging Brescia, the *angustissima mundi area* of § 4. When Henry advanced southwards, Moroello Malaspina was sent as Imperial Vicar to Brescia, whence it is evident that that nobleman's opinions had undergone a complete change since the time he led the forces of the Florentine Neri to the victory of Serravalle. For this reason Witte is inclined to assign Epistle III to the year 1309 or 1310.

Henry, as we have seen, met his end when he was proceeding to attack King Robert of Naples, and some have imagined that Robert was the person or power described in Epistle VII<sup>1</sup> as Goliath. There is little doubt, however, that a greater than he is intended—namely, Philip le Bel, who is also the giant of the thirty-second canto of the "Purgatorio,"<sup>2</sup> in which the relations between France and the Papacy are set forth under the veil of allegory. In 1304 a gross outrage had been perpetrated on the dignity of Rome and Italy by the removal of the Apostolic see to Avignon after the election of Clement V, a Gascon, to the pontificate.

<sup>1</sup> § 8.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 142-60.

## 9. EPISTLE VIII

Epistle VIII was addressed to the Italian cardinals on the death of Pope Clement in 1314, and its purpose was to impress upon them their duty at that crisis of ecclesiastical history. The epistle is a natural sequel to its immediate predecessor. The noble Henry has failed in his mission, he has gone the way of all flesh; and Dante now turns his attention to the cardinals as the *primi pili*, or chief centurions of the Church Militant, and thus best able to remedy the scandals of the existing situation. He endeavours to stir up their patriotic resentment against the conduct of the greedy Gascons in seeking to usurp the glory of the Latins, and to induce them to vote for an Italian successor to the deceased pontiff. In point of fact, the next pope was to be John of Cahors. Dante's detestation of Clement is revealed in his allusion to the "cheating Gascon" ("Par." xvii, 82), and in the speech of Peter, in which the apostle condemns Gascons and Caorsines alike.

To drink our blood the Caorsines and Gascons  
Are making ready. O thou good beginning  
Unto how vile an end must thou needs fall!<sup>1</sup>

In reading Epistle VIII one cannot fail to notice the phrase, *viduam et desertam*<sup>2</sup>—a reminiscence of the description of Florence after the death of Beatrice, in the "Vita Nuova" (*quasi vedova, dispogliata di ogni dignitate*).<sup>3</sup> Obviously, the source of the phrase is the

<sup>1</sup> "Par." xxvii, 63-6.

<sup>2</sup> § 2.

<sup>3</sup> § xxxi.

text with which the epistle opens, quoted also in the "Vita Nuova" (*loc. cit.*) as the commencement of a letter addressed to the princes of the country. It is borrowed from the prophet Jeremiah (Lam. i, 1), and Mr. Gardner considers that "there is a distinct analogy between the letter from Dante to the Cardinals at Carpentras, and the letter which Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the captives in Babylon; in spite of the strongly contrasted contents and the different objects the two writers had in view."

Epistle VIII is less exposed to the assaults of criticism than some of the others—at any rate, fewer and less determined assaults are made upon it. But one ought, we suppose, to recognize the possibility that an ingenious forger, not perhaps with any malign intention, but as a literary feat, constructed the epistle out of hints supplied by Dante's unquestioned compositions. This attitude of mind is hard to disarm, for the very coincidences of thought and style, with which the genuineness of the epistle might be deemed established, will appear to it so many evidences of imitation. If, therefore, we encounter a deviation—a slight deviation—from an apparent model, it may occur even to the sceptic that the difference is far more likely to be due to Dante himself than to a mere imitator, who would most probably have saved himself the trouble of inventing new analogies. In the nineteenth canto of the "Inferno,"<sup>1</sup> we find the following prediction of the alliance between Philip le Bel and Pope Clement:

<sup>1</sup> ll. 83-7.

For after him shall come of fouler deed  
From tow'rds the west a Pastor without law,  
Such as befits to cover him and me.  
New Jason will he be, of whom we read  
In Maccabees; and, as his king was pliant,  
So he who governs France shall be to this one.

The reference is to 2 Maccabees iv, and the prototypes of Pope and King are Jason and Antiochus. Epistle VIII, on the other hand, compares them with Alcimus and Demetrius.<sup>1</sup>

The letter is quite worthy of Dante, since it is marked by a burning eloquence and complete mastery of Latin, as it was then written. Conceiving himself challenged for touching the Ark, he announces himself as one of the least of the sheep of Christ's fold. He owes nothing to riches. "By the grace of God I am what I am, and 'the zeal of His house hath eaten me up.'" In other words, he ranks himself with the prophets of old, who, standing apart from the regular priesthood, delivered the Lord's message to their countrymen with rhythmic force and persuasive fervour, not unmixed with sharp reproof and lashing invective. With pungent sarcasm Dante excepts from his general censure of the clergy, as children of the daughters of the horse-leech, the Bishop of Luni. Gherardino Malaspina, who was not only Bishop, but Count of Luni, had been placed by Henry VII under the ban of the Empire, and had joined himself to "the most wicked Florentines within." Dante has more hope of Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, whom he

<sup>1</sup> 1 Macc. vii.



addresses by name, and who was, in this matter, a kindred spirit. This community of sentiment is proved by a letter which Orsini wrote to the King of France, deploring the prevalent corruption and expressing contrition for having aided in the election of Pope Clement, just then dead.

## 10. EPISTLE IX

Epistle IX is a private letter written by Dante to a friend at Florence with reference to the conditions of the former's repatriation. As his exile is stated to have already lasted about three "lustres," or fifteen years, the date of the epistle would be 1316. In the course of that year the Florentine government granted three amnesties to political offenders—on 2nd June, 3rd September, and 11th December. The terms on which restoration was conceded comprised the payment of a fine (combined, apparently, in some instances, with imprisonment) and afterwards an "oblation," or presentation in the Church of St. John. The provision of 2nd June, which is probably what is intended by the words "newly-made ordinance," expressly excluded those banished by Cante Gabrielli de' Cantì, as Podestà, between 1st November, 1301, and 1st July, 1302, and any who had been condemned for barratry in the exercise of public functions. It would seem, therefore, that *actually* Dante could not have profited by the indulgence, but it does not follow that this state of the case had impressed itself on his mind, or that of his friend. There had probably been some talk of

smuggling him back, with the connivance of the authorities—and the Podestà was now Count Guido of Battifolle, his former host, according to some—provided that he would submit to the prescribed penances.

Dante indignantly rejects the humiliating conditions and speaks of oblation as a “brand.” He has no thought of sharing the infamy of “a certain Ciolo”—meaning, it would seem, Ciolo degli Abati, who had received an amnesty in 1311.

Excellent critics, both German and Italian, impugn the authenticity of the Epistle, but it forms part of the Laurentian MS. and was transcribed by Boccaccio, who, in his *Life of Dante*, mentions the refusal of some such offer. Thus it may well be, as Mr. Gardner maintains, “very obviously the basis of the great passage” in the *Life*, in which the circumstance is referred to. As far as internal evidence is a clue, it distinctly favours the genuineness of the letter. The sense of dignity, the pride that conquers even passionate love of country, is thoroughly in keeping with Dante’s character. If he was to return to Florence and the Church of St. John, it must be as an honoured poet, not as a penitent politician. The phrase in which he protests that everywhere he will have sight of the sun and stars is not only akin to the language in which he bids farewell to each division of his trilogy, but recalls the famous saying of his Piccarda, “everywhere in heaven is Paradise.”<sup>1</sup> Starvation would not have compelled his submission, but he intimates that this

<sup>1</sup> “Par.” iii, 88-9.

*ultima ratio* will not be applied to him—"bread will not fail."

D. G. Rossetti esteemed the composition so highly that he has presented us with a poetical paraphrase of it:

This Dante writ in answer thus,  
Words such as these: "That clearly they  
In Florence must not have to say  
The man abode aloof from us  
Nigh fifteen years, yet lastly skulk'd  
Hither to candleshrift and mulct.

That he was one the Heavens forbid  
To traffic in God's justice sold  
By market-weight of earthly gold,  
Or to bow down over the lid  
Of steaming censers, and so be  
Made clean of manhood's obloquy.

That since no gate led, by God's will,  
To Florence, but the one whereat  
The priests and money-changers sat,  
He still would wander, for that still,  
Even through the body's prison-bars,  
His soul possessed the sun and stars."

## II. EPISTLE X

The longest and most important of the series is Epistle X, which comprises a philosophical exposition of Dante's great poem, and lays bare, so to speak, its hidden mechanism. If the letter is genuine, it is indeed hardly possible to overrate its significance. The chief reason for suspecting its authenticity is not anything that it contains, but the circumstance that it appears to have been entirely unknown to Boccaccio

and the early commentators, and has been transmitted in MSS., not one of which is anterior to the fifteenth century.

The letter is addressed to Can Grande della Scala,<sup>1</sup> a leader of the Ghibelline League and a member of a family that had shown great kindness to the poet in the early years of his exile. Accepting the ancient formula that friendship implies *quid pro quo*, Dante dedicates to Can Grande the "Paradiso" as the most precious gift he has to offer, and accompanies the present with an elucidation of the principles underlying the entire poem. The ample compliments bestowed on his patron are not disproportionate to the high praise accorded him in the "Commedia,"<sup>2</sup> while the passages in which he excuses his own unworthiness are expansions of terser utterances in the opening cantos of the poem, notably the lines:

But I, why thither come, or who concedes it?  
I not Aeneas am, I am not Paul;  
Nor I, nor others, think me worthy of it.<sup>3</sup>

According to Boccaccio it was Dante's wont, when he had finished six or eight stanzas, to send them, in the first place, to Can Grande della Scala, "whom he had in reverence above all other men." From the fact that Dante does not salute him with the title of "captain" conferred upon him by the council of the Ghibelline League at Soncino, on 18th December, 1318, it has been concluded that the present epistle was written before that date. As Can Grande was

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> "Par." xvii, 76-93.

<sup>3</sup> "Inf." ii, 31-3.

nine years old in 1300 ("Par." xvii, 80-1), he would have been quite a young man at the time when he became the recipient of the epistle, and if he was able to comprehend and appreciate the technicalities in which it abounds, he must have possessed educational attainments of a high order. The letter, though it is a valuable index of Dante's meaning and intentions, is far from being a complete explanation of the many mysteries of the "Commedia." Since Dante dedicates only the "Paradiso" to Can Grande, the epistle is chiefly occupied with that *cantica*, but the part could not be interpreted without reference to the whole, and accordingly the author finds it necessary to pass observations on the structure and aims of the "Commedia" in general. He enters somewhat fully into the philosophical anatomy of the prologue of the "Paradiso," but does not complete even what he proposed to say about that, assigning as the reason his narrow means. It is his hope, if Can Grande should alleviate his circumstances, to continue his discourse, and not only finish his exposition of the prologue, but set forth its relations to the "executive part," or main body, of the *cantica*.

The fourfold signification of the poem, as expounded in § 7, exactly corresponds with the method of interpretation applied to, or predicated of, Canzone I, in the "Convivio,"<sup>1</sup> the example from Psalm cxiii (cxiv) being again used. The literal subject of the "Commedia" is the state of souls after death; allegorically, the subject is "man, in so far as by merit or demerit through the

<sup>1</sup> ii, 1.

exercise of freewill he is liable to the justice that rewards or punishes." On the moral and anagogical aspects of the poem Dante says nothing, probably because he deemed them self-evident or identical with the third and fourth senses attributed to the words of the Psalm ("the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to a state of grace," and "the departure of a holy soul from the bondage of this corruption to the liberty of everlasting glory"). This view will be confirmed on comparing §§ 15, 16, in which he defines the end or object of the "Paradiso" alone and its philosophic kind. The latter, he states, is moral, since the poem as a whole was undertaken with a practical aim, not for displaying theoretical knowledge. And the end of both whole and part is "to remove those living in this life from a state of misery, and to lead them to a state of felicity." The allegory of the "Commedia" is to be found principally in the "Inferno" and "Purgatorio," representing man's life on earth; the anagogy almost entirely in the "Paradiso." This curious term is derived from the Greek *ἀναγωγή*, and signifies a "lifting up of the soul." The word is not of Dante's invention; it is used by the Greek Fathers in much the same sense of mystical interpretation.

The last section of Epistle X deals particularly with the anagogy of the "Paradiso" in respect of those interviews with blessed spirits, in which they reveal to Dante's inquiring intellect so many precious truths, which he, in turn, communicates to men. Mr. Gardner happily observes that Dante was in the position of that saintly soul depicted in the fourth book of the "Con-

vivio" as being in the fourth and last stage of its earthly probation, which "returns to God as to the port whence she set out, when first she entered upon the sea of this life." It is worth while to quote his translation of the passage:

"And as his fellow-citizens come forth to meet him who returns from a long journey, even before he enters the gates of his city; so to the noble soul come forth the citizens of the Eternal Life. And thus do they by reason of her good works and contemplations; for, being now rendered to God, and abstracted from worldly things and thoughts, she seems to see those who she believes are with God."<sup>1</sup>

Dante discusses, besides the subject, the form and title of the poem. Form is of two kinds; one regards the division of the work into cantiche, cantos, and rhymes, and the other has to do with literary technique. The title runs: "Here beginneth the Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by nation, not morals." The section devoted to this topic states the origin of the term "Comedy," for which Dante was indebted to Uguccione's book about derivations, and he explains why he chose it as the title of his poem. Comedy, he observes, is the exact opposite of tragedy, since the former has a rude beginning and ends happily. This is true of the "Commedia," which commences with the horrors of the "Inferno," and concludes with the joys of the "Paradiso." There was, however, a second reason, which he had discovered in the "Ars Poetica" of Horace—that comedy naturally adopts an easy, col-

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." iv, 28.



loquial style. This is a feature of his own composition, written in the vulgar idiom in which little women converse. Hence it will be seen that Dante was not influenced in the smallest degree by the dramatic element in his poem, and still less by its excursions into the region of burlesque. Indeed, there is no more extraordinary example of the vicissitudes of language, than that a term, which, on Dante's own showing, originally meant a rustic ditty, should be used to designate the most elaborate poem, on the most solemn of themes, that has ever been penned.

## 12. ECLOGUES

Dante, however, was out of sympathy neither with pastoral subjects nor with pastoral poetry. He mentions incidentally that he once saw a flock of frightened sheep jump, one after the other, into a well;<sup>1</sup> and this is merely one of many similes drawn from the life of the fields. It may seem at first rather inconsequent to conclude this account of Dante's epistles with his two eclogues, but the latter are essentially epistolary in character, and the circumstance that they are in metre may be neglected as an accident. The compositions belong to the latest period of Dante's existence, when he was residing at Ravenna, and the way they came to be written was as follows:

Giovanni del Virgilio, a jurist of Bologna, and an admirer of the poet, sent him an epistle in Latin hexameters, in which he reproached him for casting his

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." i, 11.

pearls before swine by inditing his masterpiece in one of the Italian dialects. He was anxious that Dante should come to Bologna and receive the laurel wreath in that city. With that object he placed before him a choice of subjects which he deemed worthy to engage the poet's pen, and were all concerned with important contemporary events, such as the death of Henry VII, the memorable combat at Monte Catini, in which Ugucione della Faggiuola overthrew the army of Florence, a military success of Can Grande della Scala, and the naval expedition of King Robert of Naples for the succour of Genoa. The last of these incidents occurred in the summer of 1318—a circumstance that helps to fix the date of the correspondence.

To this overture Dante replied in a poem which was, like Giovanni's, in Latin hexameters, but the answer took the form of an eclogue, wherein Dante styles himself Tityrus and Giovanni del Virgilio Mopsus—names familiar to them both from figuring in the first and fifth eclogues of the Roman Virgil. Other pseudonyms are Meliboeus and Alpheisiboeus, of which the former stands for Dino Perini, a fellow-exile of the poet, and the latter for Fiducio de' Milotti, while Guido Novello appears under the disguise of Iolas. These characters also are borrowed from the *Bucolica*.

It is at first rather surprising that Dante, after all the labour bestowed on his great Italian poem, should have condescended to these Latin exercises. One would almost have expected that—*per lungo silenzio fioco*—he had forgotten the art, and would have feared

to compete with an expert versifier like Giovanni. Instead of that he enters with zest into the pastime, writing with wonderful ease, just as if this style of composition were his regular avocation. From the way he expresses himself towards the close of the first eclogue, in which he writes of his hands as ready to milk and promises to send Mopsus ten full pails, it has been inferred that the "Commedia" was not yet finished, the ten pails representing an instalment of ten cantos of the "Paradiso." (The commencement of Giovanni's poem indicates that the "Inferno" and "Purgatorio" were not only complete, but known to the writer.) Thus it would seem that Dante actually interrupted his important task in order to engage in this graceful recreation. It is difficult to understand Gaspari's assertion that Dante "put down the presumptuous act of impertinence with fine irony." On the contrary, he appears to have been delighted at Virgilio's interest, and writes in the gayest of spirits. He tells us that he *laughed* at Meliboeus and could hardly stop *laughing*.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that he had not renounced all hope of returning to Florence, and being crowned with the laurel in his own city, when it had been fully earned by the portrayal of the heavenly regions. So Mopsus must excuse him. Dante takes Giovanni's criticisms in good part, having indeed anticipated them in his letter to Can Grande,<sup>2</sup> and he humorously proposes to keep him in tow by forwarding more of the same poetical stuff that had incurred his censure.

<sup>1</sup> ll. 41-3.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 52-3; Epistle x, ll. 224-5.

In his second epistle Giovanni adopts the pastoral style, and referring to Dante's cherished hope of restoration to Florence, makes one allusion which would be consistent with better relations between Dante and his wife than have been generally suspected.

Ah me! that thou should'st dwell in squalid hut  
With dust o'erlaid, and should'st in righteous wrath  
Mourn for the fields of Arno, fields from thee  
Stolen, and from thy flock. Ah, deed of shame  
For that ungrateful city! . . .  
Oh, that once more thou mightest see thy locks,  
Locks grey and sacred, gain a second youth,  
Grown golden, and be trimmed by Phyllis' self.  
How wilt thou then behold with wondering look  
Thy vine-clad cottage! <sup>1</sup>

The natural interpretation of this passage is that Giovanni included in his good wishes not merely Dante's return to Florence, but reunion with the wife of his youth. Meanwhile he renews the invitation to the poet to visit Bologna. In his reply Dante finally rejects the suggestion. Already in his first eclogue he had intimated his fear of "forests and heathenish regions," meaning by this that Bologna was a place with anti-Imperial traditions. He now professes alarm at the monster Polyphemus, intending probably King Robert of Naples. The whole eclogue depicts Mopsus as a Sicilian shepherd foolishly enamoured of "the dry rocks of the Cecropes."

It is stated by the writer of the glosses in the Laurentian MS. that the second eclogue, which is supposed

<sup>1</sup> ii, 35-8; 44-6; Plumptre's tr.

to have been written in the spring of 1320 or 1321 did not reach Virgilio until after Dante's death, when Jacopo, the poet's son, discovered it and sent it to the Bolognese scholar. Towards the close of the poem we meet with the lines:

This honoured head, to gather wreaths for which,  
Wreaths that fade not, e'en now prepares himself  
The dresser of the vineyard.<sup>1</sup>

This language seems as if inspired by premonitions of approaching death, and Giovanni del Virgilio so read it. The two do not appear to have met in this world, and the younger man, unable to testify his reverence for Dante in any other way, indited his epitaph.

It should not pass unnoticed that in these eclogues Dante revived pastoral verse, which had been in abeyance since the Augustan age, and was destined to acquire considerable vogue both in Italy and in Europe generally. The poems are immeasurably superior to most of the kind produced subsequently, but, in spite of that, their authenticity has been called in question. The second eclogue, in particular, has been suspected, partly because Dante, as Tityrus, is mentioned in the third person—in the first eclogue this is not the case—and partly because it has been deemed unlikely that the poet would apply to himself such flattering expressions as "this honoured head." But many passages might be cited, proving that Dante had come to regard the poetic laurel as his due, and

<sup>1</sup> ll. 86-7; Plumptre's tr.

he does not scruple to class himself with the greatest poets of antiquity.

The sixth was I, 'mid so much wit.<sup>1</sup>

### 13. SONNET TO GIOVANNI QUERINI

Several of Dante's Italian poems are of an epistolary nature, but it will be convenient to refer to them elsewhere, with the exception of the sonnet addressed to Giovanni Querini, which may be termed his *Nunc Dimittis*. Querini was a Venetian poet, who sent Can Grande a sonnet wherein he calls himself his "faithful servitor, desirous of seeing the holy glory of the Paradise the poet sings." He therefore prays him "to be pleased to show forth the fair flowers of that plant," *i.e.* to publish some cantos of the "Paradiso." To this warm admirer Dante—supposing the composition to be genuine—revealed the feelings that possessed him in his last years; the reader will not fail to observe how well they accord with the sentiments set forth in the passage of the "Convivio" before quoted.

The King by whose rich grace His servants be  
 With plenty beyond measure set to dwell,  
 Ordains that I my bitter wrath dispel,  
 And lift my eyes to the great consistory;  
 Till, noting how in glorious quires agree  
 The citizens of that fair citadel,  
 To the Creator I His creature swell  
 Their song, and all their love possesses me.

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." iv, 102.

So when I contemplate the great reward  
To which our God has called the Christian seed,  
I long for nothing else but only this.  
And then my soul is grieved in thy regard,  
Dear friend, who reck'st not of thy nearest need,  
Renouncing for slight joys the perfect bliss.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rossetti's tr. of Sonnet XXXVII.



PART II  
CRITICAL AND TECHNICAL



## CHAPTER I

### DANTE'S PLACE IN LITERATURE

#### I. THE LATIN INCUBUS

AT the conclusion of the preceding section we had occasion to allude to Dante's estimate of his own importance as a poet. As we there observed, he claimed to rank with the first of the world's bards, who had existed up to that time—Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. It is singular that he does not include Statius in this elect company, since in the twenty-fourth canto of the "Purgatorio"<sup>1</sup> he couples him with Virgil, terming them "mighty marshals of the world." Dante, then, has himself pointed to his place in literature—he is "a marshal of the world." Not one of the ancients with whom he challenges comparison, with the exception of Homer, attained his standard of greatness, and of moderns Shakespeare alone can be set in the same category.

It was not, however, with any idea of vindicating Dante's pre-eminence as a poet that we resolved on the inclusion of the present chapter. It was rather to indicate his relationships with writers of lesser note

<sup>1</sup> l. 99.

—his obligations to half-forgotten singers, whose experiments prepared the way for him, and apart from whom his genius would have taken a widely different direction.

Dante's indebtedness is colossal. He assimilated nearly all that was accessible in sacred and profane literature, and so great was his appetite for learning it may well be thought that, if the culture of the age had comprehended a knowledge of Greek, his erudition would have been yet greater. But Dante was restricted to Latin, and his references to Homer and Aristotle are a little misleading. The former he knew only as a great name, a great tradition, while the philosophical works of the Stagyrte were available only at second or third hand, through the medium of Latin translations. Latin occupied a unique position in his esteem, both on account of its perfection as a language, and the intellectual treasures of which it was the key. It may be added that Dante did not conceive of Latin and Italian as entirely separate and distinct. Latin was a grammatical form of Italian; Italian, *Latinum vulgare*. He might thus regard himself as being in the succession of great poets of old—Virgil, Horace, etc.—in another sense than Chaucer, for example. Whether he wrote in Latin or in “dialect” was a matter of convenience, and, to some extent, of prescription. There were considerations leading both ways—considerations on which he dwells at length in the “Convivio.” The chief obstacle to the use of Italian was the aristocratic prejudice of which Virgilio makes himself the mouthpiece in his first

poetical epistle with its picture of Davus, the typical slave of Latin comedy, seeking to solve the riddles of the "ambiguous sphinx" in the cross-ways. Further evidence of this bias may be found in the Letter of Frate Ilario.

"But I beholding there the vulgar tongue, and showing by the fashion of my countenance my wonderment thereat, he asked the reason of the same. I answered that I marvelled he should sing in that language; for it seemed a difficult thing, nay incredible, that those most high conceptions could be expressed in common language; nor did it seem right such and so worthy a science should be clothed in such plebeian garments. 'You think aright,' he said, 'and I myself have thought so.' And when at first the seeds of these matters, perhaps inspired by Heaven, began to bud, I chose that language which was most worthy of them; and not alone chose it, but began forthwith to poetize therein, after this wise:

*Ultima regna canam fluido contermina mundo  
Spiritus quae lata patent; quae praemia solvunt  
Pro meritis cuicumque suis.*

"But when I recalled the condition of the present age, and saw the songs of the illustrious poets esteemed almost as naught, and knew that the generous men, for whom in better days these things were written, had abandoned, ah me! the liberal arts unto vulgar hands, I threw aside the delicate lyre, which had armed my flank, and attuned another more befitting the ear

of moderns. For the food that is hard we hold in vain to the mouths of sucklings."<sup>1</sup>

Whether such words were ever uttered by Dante makes no difference for our present purpose, since there is reason to think they represent, accurately enough, his view of the subject. Thus in the "Convivio"<sup>2</sup> he speaks of the wicked neglect that has abandoned learning to those who prostitute it for gain, while the really noble—princes, barons, knights, and also ladies, qualified to enjoy the pleasures of intellect—are strangers to Latin. We have to remember that many of Dante's writings, his Epistles, his Eclogues, his treatises on popular poetry and monarchy, and possibly some others—are in Latin, obviously because it was in those days the language of diplomacy, the Universities, and the Church. As the "Commedia" deals with the mysteries of religion and recapitulates most of the topics already treated in the Epistles and the "De Monarchia," Latin appeared the more natural and appropriate vehicle, while the use of the despised vernacular was a palpable innovation. It is not that Italian was deemed unsuitable for *all* literary composition—it was well enough for amatory verse—but there was no precedent for its employment in a poem intended to be immortal and sublime. While Dante touched, on the one hand, the classical writers and those whose self-esteem was founded on an acquaintance with them, on the other hand he stood in close relations with the professors of a modern art of poetry, which had formerly arrived at some distinction in

<sup>1</sup> Arrivabene, "Comento Storico," p. 379.

<sup>2</sup> i, 9.

Provence, and had recently advanced in the Peninsula, so as to command the adhesion and respect of men of talent and learning, like Dante himself. The "Commedia" is the final reconciliation of these divergent and hostile tendencies, notwithstanding Petrarch's attempt, in the next generation, to bring about their divorce.

## 2. TROUBADOUR ART

In the "Vita Nuova"<sup>1</sup> Dante has some interesting remarks on the origin, history, and status of those whom he terms *dicitori per rima* ("rhymers"). According to his account, which appears to be correct, the rise of this class was a comparatively recent phenomenon, dating back not more than one hundred and fifty years from the time he was writing. He evidently regards them as usurpers, who have taken the place of the neo-Latin poets, and he finds the reason of their popularity in the exigences of love. It was no use addressing a lady in Latin, because she did not understand the language. A love-poem in the vernacular, on the contrary, might win its way, not only to her head, but to her heart.

Dante's opinion of the *dicitori*, as there stated, is a somewhat low one, and he seems hardly to know what to make of them, or where to place them. He is reluctant to accord them the name of poets—a term reserved for those dignified by learning, who can blossom forth in the Latin tongue, and are able to

<sup>1</sup> § xxv.



theorize on their art, as he himself proceeds to do in that very passage. Yet he is constrained to allow they are nothing else than *poeti volgari*, and to grant them the same licence as poets proper.

Now it is plain that Dante refers not merely to Italian rhymers, but to those of Provence, since the native poetry was a product of troubadour verse, and the period assigned to the genesis and growth of vernacular literature covers the brief life of Provençal minstrelsy, while it would be much too long for the imitative offshoot. As we shall hereafter see more clearly, Dante looked upon Provençal and Italian, and, in less degree, North French poetry as a common study, and in his "*De Vulgari Eloquentia*" he culls examples, almost indifferently, from writers in all three languages. It is significant that he calls contemporary Italian rhymers "troubadours,"<sup>1</sup> thus affirming the identity of the art on both sides of the Alps.

The greatest of the Provençal poets, to Petrarch as to Dante, was Arnaut Daniel, who is introduced into the twenty-sixth canto of the "*Purgatorio*," and permitted to speak in his own language—a privilege vouchsafed to no other foreigner. Other troubadours mentioned in the "*Commedia*" are Geraut de Borneuil, Folquet de Marseilles, Bertran de Born, and, above all, Sordello, an Italian born at Goito, near Mantua. Some few more are named in the "*De Vulgari Eloquentia*," which affords abundant proof of Dante's acquaintance with Provençal writings. Moreover, of the seven examples of munificence cited in the "*Con-*

<sup>1</sup> "*Vita Nuova*," § iii.

vivio"<sup>1</sup> four are directly attributable to Dante's study of the Provençal "Lives of the Troubadours." It is worth remarking that, while Dante was clearly familiar with Sordello's compositions, the incidents of the troubadour's career,<sup>2</sup> including his elopement with Cunizza, were derived from a *sirventes* of Peire Bremon Ricas Novas.

This deep and extensive knowledge with Provençal models cannot have been without effect on Dante's modes of thought and expression, and the honourable place assigned to Sordello in the "Commedia" is evidently an acknowledgement of the benefit received from his poems—more especially his "Ensenhamen." Dante can hardly have included Sordello and Arnaut Daniel, the latter of whom he considerably overrates, in his disparaging allusions to the *dicitori* in the "Vita Nuova," but it is a fact that Provençal poetry is essentially mediocre, and Dante seems to have realized its limitations. The word "troubadour" means "inventor"—"inventor," that is to say, of new and complicated metres wedded to original airs, which, in reality, determined the form of the stanza. The troubadour was therefore first a composer, then a metrician, and only thirdly a poet. The melody was called the *son*, and the term "sonnet," a misnomer, is reminiscent of the circumstance. Dante, being a true poet, was naturally most concerned with the sentiment or substance of his verse, but he was not indifferent to a musical accompaniment, and Casella appears to have set several of his odes—notably "Amor che nella mente

<sup>1</sup> iv, 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Par." ix.

mi ragiona,"<sup>1</sup> one of those selected for comment in the "Convivio." In the second book of that treatise he speaks of the last stanza of a canzone, which was known as the *tornata*.<sup>2</sup> It was so called, he tells us, because it was originally the practice for *dicitori*, having ended their song, to return to, or recapitulate, the points of the composition. Dante himself departed from the usage, and he draws attention to the fact that the concluding stanzas of his own odes not only introduce matter extraneous in sense to the main body of the poem, but seldom correspond to the other stanzas in structure, so that they could not be sung to the same air. This renders it evident that, however appreciatively Dante may record Casella's services, he thought of the musical setting in the same way as a modern lyrical poet would do—as a mere accessory that must adapt itself to the words, not *vice versa*.

### 3. THE DOLCE STIL NUOVO

On the other hand, Dante was very strict with regard to prosody, and it was in the domain of versification that he found himself most in sympathy with the troubadours, to whose rules he conformed, and whom he endeavoured to rival in the intricacy of his metres. Dante was a great master of rhythm, and this necessary equipment he owed, in a large measure, to the minstrel-poets of Provence. But he owed something—nay, much—to his Italian predecessors, not only in the direction of rhythm, but in the cultivation of the

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." ii, 106-12; "Conv." iii.

<sup>2</sup> "Conv." ii, 12.

language for poetic purposes and the adoption of a more elevated style of thought. Some of the earlier poets—Dante of Maiano—were bilingual and wrote indifferently in Provençal and Italian, but Alighieri was indebted less to those pioneers who clothed troubadour ideas in Italian dress, than to the later philosophic school—the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*, whom he acknowledged as compeers. The phrase quoted—it is constantly employed by critics and historians of Italian literature in a technical sense—occurs in a speech ascribed to Buonagiunta da Lucca in the twenty-fourth canto of the “Purgatorio.”<sup>1</sup>

“O brother, now I see,” he said, “the knot,  
Which me, the Notary, and Guittone held  
Short of the *sweet new style* that now I hear.”

By “the Notary” is meant Jacopo da Lentini, who is put forward as a prominent representative of the Sicilian school of Italian poetry, which flourished in the first half of the thirteenth century, and was marked by its close adherence to Provençal models. Guittone d’Arezzo and Buonagiunta belong to the *scuola dottrinale*, which formed a transition from the Sicilian school to that of the *dolce stil nuovo*, and occupied the second half of the thirteenth century. Guittone began by writing in the troubadour manner, and his early poems differ from Provençal verse chiefly by their lack of artistic grace. Later in life he abandoned this lighter vein for a more pretentious style, disfigured by intentional obscurity and abundance of

<sup>1</sup> ll. 55-7.

Latinisms. In a dry, unemotional way and with hardly a touch of originality, he discoursed on morals, philosophy, and religion, and thus acquired a considerable reputation, which Dante held to be undeserved, and a deplorable example of the uncritical applause of the ignorant public.<sup>1</sup> He found fault not only with the mechanical nature of the compositions of the two preceding schools, the absence of true feeling and all that goes to make real poetry, but with their diction. Buonagiunta da Lucca, Guittone d'Arezzo, and Brunetto Latini, he maintains, are, strictly speaking, municipal (or, as we should say, provincial) rather than national poets, whereas Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, Cino da Pistoia, and himself have plumbed the excellence of the vulgar tongue.<sup>2</sup>

These four are the most distinguished exponents of the *dolce stil nuovo*, which is characterized on the one hand by the purity and refinement of its language, and on the other by the freshness and ideality with which it treats of woman and love. It is based on philosophic conceptions, but it is not often these are obtruded on our notice in a formal fashion. There is "a hidden ground of thought and of austerity within," but outside, the Muse is "young, gay, radiant, adorn'd." Imagination and fancy are granted free play; they are not sacrificed to the tyranny of the syllogism, as was the case in Guittone's productions. Dante was not the founder of this school, for Guido Cavalcanti—not to mention others—was his senior by ten years. The real

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxvi, 124-6.

<sup>2</sup> "De Vulg. Eloq." i, 13.

founder, however, was Guido Guinicelli, of Bologna (1230-1276), of whom he speaks as

the father  
Of me and of my betters, who had ever  
Practised the sweet and gracious rhymes of love.<sup>1</sup>

Guinicelli was the author of one ode, in particular, in which philosophy is expounded by means of sensible images and in a strain of high emotional, almost religious, ecstasy and fervour. This poem was truly epoch-making and directly inspired several of Dante's lyrics, besides fixing his general point of view. Gentleness, or nobility of character, is predicated in the lover as an indispensable condition, and the only adequate symbol of love's transcendent passion, with its light and fire, is the Sun, or God. As the ode served the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo* as a kind of creed and was the corner stone of their philosophy, it will not be amiss to quote some of the stanzas.

Within the gentle heart Love shelters him,  
As birds within the green shade of the grove.  
Before the gentle heart, in Nature's scheme,  
Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love.

For with the sun, at once,  
So sprang its light immediately; nor was  
Its birth before the sun's.  
And Love hath its effect in gentleness  
Of very self; even as  
Within the middle fire the heat's excess.

The fire of Love comes to the gentle heart  
Like as its virtue to a precious stone;  
To which no star its influence can impart  
Till it is made a pure thing by the sun:

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxvi, 97-9.

For when the sun hath smit  
 From out its essence that which then was vile,  
 The star endoweth it.  
 And so the heart created by God's breath  
 Pure, true, and clean from guile,  
 A woman, like a star, enamoureth.

God in the understanding of high Heaven  
 Burns more than in our sight the living sun:  
 There to behold His Face unveiled is given;  
 And Heaven, whose will is homage paid to One,  
 Fulfils the things which live  
 In God, from the beginning excellent.  
 So should my lady give  
 That truth which in her eyes is glorified,  
 On which her heart is bent,  
 To me, whose service waiteth at her side.

"My lady," God shall ask, "what daredst thou?"  
 (When my soul stands with all her acts reviewed:)  
 "Thou passedst Heaven, into My sight, as now  
 To make Me of vain love similitude.  
 To Me doth praise belong,  
 And to the Queen of all the realm of grace,  
 Who endeth fraud and wrong."  
 Then may I plead, "As though from Thee he came,  
 Love wore an angel's face:  
 Lord, if I loved her, count it not my shame."

Rossetti's translation is so good that it seems a little ungracious to point out a small inaccuracy in the last three lines. The word "Love" is not found in the original verse. Guinicelli is speaking of his lady. It was his lady, not Love, who "wore an angel's face," as if *she* came from God. Formally, the matter is of some importance as the poets of this school spiritualize woman and constantly insist on her



angelic aspect and nature. Her celestial origin is one of their conventions. The mystery of love and the sanctity of woman are the two poles on which the whole of this poetry, in so far as it is true to itself, revolves. Dante uses the phrase *dolce stil nuovo*<sup>1</sup> but once, but the cognate expression *dolci detti* occurs in its immediate context, and is also applied to Cino's love poems in a sonnet that Dante addressed to him.<sup>2</sup> The term *dolce* (literally "sweet") signified what we call charming. In what did the charm consist? Dante traced it to three dominant features—spontaneity, grace, and novelty.<sup>3</sup> In the "Convivio,"<sup>4</sup> as in Canzone xx, he distinguishes between the *bontà* and *bellezza* (the "goodness" and "goodliness") of his verse, placing the former in the embellishment of the language, and the latter in the mystic significance; and he confidently expects that the former quality will commend it to many unable to divine the latent meaning. His ode is to plead:

Observe at least how beauteous I am.<sup>5</sup>

We are now in a position to define Dante's place in literature, especially as a *dicitore*. From the Provençals he imbibed a scrupulous regard for metrical precision, from Guittone and his followers, the element of learning and the tendency to be recondite and obscure as regards the kernel of his discourse, and from Guinicelli and the later apostles of the *dolce stil nuovo*, pre-

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxvi, 122.

<sup>2</sup> Son. xxxiv, 14.

<sup>3</sup> "Purg." xxiv, 50-60.

<sup>4</sup> ii, 12.

<sup>5</sup> "Conv." ii; Canz. i, 61.

occupation with the essence of love combined with a natural, picturesque and passionate style, and pure and elevated diction. In the "Commedia" Dante departed in some measure from the rules to which he had subscribed as a *dicitore*—one of the band of the *dolce stil nuovo*—and became a law unto himself. The licences in which he indulged are covered and explained by the fact that, while his odes are throughout lofty and fastidious compositions, that conform to the "*tragic* use" of the vernacular poets,<sup>1</sup> the "Commedia," answering to its title, is less tense, more varied in tone, containing many passages unmatched for their sublimity, whilst in others it descends to a homely simplicity that would have been judged out of place in a canzone. Dante, then, may be regarded, in his final phase, as an enlarged and emancipated Florentine *dicitore*, who had not indeed forgotten the principles of his early art, but had adapted them to the demands of a matured genius, whose potent originality could no longer be confined by formula.

<sup>1</sup> "De Vulg. Eloq." ii, 7.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA"

#### I. SCOPE

WE have now considered, in the most general way, Dante's place with respect to formative poetical tendencies. Hitherto we have discussed only those of his writings which are in Latin, and for the sake of convenience we shall pursue this course until we have done with his Latin works. The circumstance that Dante left a relatively large body of Latin prose compositions is sufficiently striking, seeing that he was the avowed champion of the *volgare*. The reason, doubtless, is that while Italian poetry by dint of use had already acquired a degree of fixity, Italian prose was still inchoate. On this point we shall have something to say when we come to deal with the "Vita Nuova."

Dante's attitude towards Latin and Italian, as rival modes of speech, betrays some inconsistency. In the "Convivio"<sup>1</sup> he places the former on an altogether higher plane, while in the "De Vulgari Eloquentia"<sup>2</sup> he contends that the latter is necessarily the more

<sup>1</sup> i, 7.

<sup>2</sup> i, 1.

noble. These divergent accounts may be easily reconciled. Latin was better fitted for the formulation of scientific and philosophical ideas, but it could never attain to the vital warmth, the persuasive force of a language to which one has been accustomed from infancy. The "De Vulgari Eloquentia" is written in Latin because it is philosophical and scientific, and designed for a class of readers apt to despise the speech and songs of the people. Dante had committed his fame to the *volgare*, and thus this treatise may be regarded as in some sort an *apologia*, but its main object was to afford help and guidance to those who might follow in the writer's footsteps.

In the passage of the "Vita Nuova" before referred to,<sup>1</sup> Dante speaks of *dicitori* in the mass, and, as we have seen, hesitates to accord them the name of poets. In the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" he recognizes they are poets, but *irregular* poets. The great Latin poets have distinguished themselves by scrupulous observance of the laws of versification, whereas the *dicitori* compose at random.<sup>2</sup> It was with the intention of remedying this state of things that Dante undertook the present treatise. *Eloquentia*, in this context, signifies poetical style. Gaspari, in his extremely useful and able "History of Italian Literature,"<sup>3</sup> denies this, and affirms that *eloquentia* "stands for language, or, at the outside, for eloquence in general." In support of this opinion he points out that the author states at the commencement that *vulgaris eloquentia* is necessary for all, and that even women and children

<sup>1</sup> See p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> ii, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Oelsner's tr., p. 255.

strive after it. But women do not strive after language in the simple sense. On the other hand, there are probably few persons of either sex who have not at some time in their lives attempted rhyme, which necessarily implies conscious effort. As for Gaspar's other argument that at the close of the first book Dante proposes to deal with the other *vulgaria* after discussing the *vulgare illustre*, it is pretty evident that he intended to treat of them in relation to poetry.<sup>1</sup> What he means by *eloquentia* is shown by the concluding sentence of chapter xii, in which he says that the "eloquent" natives of Sicily and Apulia have departed from their own dialect, as he had shown, *i.e.* by specimens of their poetry.

It is hardly worth while for Gaspar to concede that *eloquentia* may signify "eloquence in general," as artistic prose could hardly be said to exist. In the sixth chapter of the second book Dante adduces examples of beautiful prose constructions in *Latin*, while analogous constructions in Provençal and Italian are cited from the poets.<sup>2</sup> It may seem strange that the term "eloquence," which we associate with prose or oratory, should be consistently applied to poetry, but any surprise felt on this score is diminished, not only by the absence of prose models, but by Dante's definition of poetry as "nothing else than rhetorical invention in a musical setting."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See ii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> This is natural, as Dante is treating specifically of the "tragic" style; why, however, Latin prose sentences? See below.

<sup>3</sup> ii, 4.

*Note.* The writer has been led to reconsider this most difficult question by chancing on the identical phrase *vulgaris eloquentia* in a context in which it seems impossible that *eloquentia* can bear any other construction than "language." In 1274 the Council of Salzburg prohibited the festival of the Boy-Bishop, speaking of it as "ludi noxii quos vulgaris eloquentia Episcopus puerorum appellat." This proves that the word might be, and was, used in the simple sense of "language." It does not follow, however, that Dante so used it, and the probability is that he did not. Indeed, he seems to guard against misconception by a tacit distinction between *eloquentia* and *locutio* in the opening section. When he means mere speech he employs the latter term. It is also pretty clear that when he describes *vulgaris locutio* as the *subjectum* he intends not that it is the subject of the treatise, but that it is the raw material of the study, whereas *eloquentia* is the finished article. The very expression *vulgaris eloquentiae doctrina* (or "science of vulgar eloquence"), indicates that perfection of speech is the end or purpose, and as such perfection had been attained only in verse, the treatise naturally resolved itself into an *ars poetica*. The whole discussion recalls a saying of Cicero, which explains much of the uncertainty attaching to the employment of terms that must have been almost synonymous originally, and may again have been confused in the careless diction of mediaeval scribes: "Quamquam enim omnis locutio oratio est, tamen unius oratoris locutio hoc proprio signata nomine est" ("Or." 19, 64).

## 2. TITLE

The correct form of the title is undoubtedly "De Vulgari Eloquentia," which is used by Dante himself both in this treatise and the "Convivio."<sup>1</sup> Villani, Boccaccio, and Bruni also mention the work by this name. Yet for a long while the title "De Vulgari Eloquio" prevailed. Gaspary is wrong in attributing

<sup>1</sup> i, 4.

this error to Villani. It sprang from the MS. heading of the first chapter, *Incipit liber de vulgari eloquio, sive idiomate, editus per Dantem.*<sup>1</sup>

### 3. DATE

The date of the first book can be determined approximately from internal evidence. The fact that Dante alludes to his exile<sup>2</sup> proves that it was written subsequently to 1301, while the mention of John of Montferrat as still living,<sup>3</sup> attests that it was composed before January, 1305—the date of that nobleman's death. There seems to be no sufficient reason for questioning that the second book, or what we have of it, belongs to the same period, though some hold that it was produced in the last years of Dante's life, and, more precisely, in 1319 or 1320.<sup>4</sup> The treatise was to include at least four books, but it breaks off in the fourteenth chapter of the second. It is much to be regretted that the work was never completed, as the fourth book was to contain a dissertation on the "comic" style,<sup>5</sup> by which is probably meant the style exemplified in the "Commedia." If the fourth book had been written the date of the second and succeeding books of the treatise might have been roughly calculated by the nature of the references, if any, to Dante's masterpiece. If, that is to say, there were quotations from the later books of the "Paradiso," we should be safe in assigning the treatise to the close

<sup>1</sup> Toynbee, "Studies," p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> i, 12.

<sup>4</sup> ii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> i, 6.

<sup>5</sup> ii, 4.



of the poet's life. But for the time-references in the first book, there would be something tempting in the theory that just as in the "*Vita Nuova*" Dante analyzes certain earlier poems, so at the end of his career he devoted himself to an account of the principles by which he and others had succeeded in raising Italian letters to a position equal or superior to that of North France and Provence.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. LANGUAGE IN GENERAL

Dante begins at the beginning, and deals in the first instance with the phenomenon of language. Speech is the peculiar attribute of man, shared neither by the angels nor by the lower creations, because they have no need of it. The axiom that Nature abhors superfluity is repeated in the "*De Monarchia*."<sup>2</sup> The opening chapters are taken up with the discussion of sundry curious questions, such as whether Adam or Eve was the first speaker, and what was the language of Eden. Dante pronounces for Hebrew, which continued to be the one universal language down to the building of the Tower of Babel, and was inherited by the sons of Heber, thence called Hebrews. Here, as in the "*De Monarchia*," Dante strongly supports the Providential view of history, and holds that the transmission of the original language, fashioned by man in the time of his innocence, was ordained that it might be spoken by Christ.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> i, 10.

<sup>2</sup> i, 14.

<sup>3</sup> See "*Par.*" xxvi, 109, etc., which contradicts this account.

Dante then proceeds to sketch the consequences of the confusion of tongues, and, as far as Europe is concerned, distributes the population into three large groups, one extending from the mouth of the Danube to the western boundaries of England, the second on the east of Hungary, and the third comprising the rest of Europe. This portion of the treatise is open to serious criticism, as Dante appears to have thought that the Hungarians and Slavs were Teutonic races, and that the Spaniards spoke the *lingua d'oc*, whereas this was only true of the inhabitants of the north-eastern provinces. However, he says truly that North French, Provençal, and Italian are offshoots of one language, and he conveniently distinguishes them by their symbols of affirmation, *oïl*, *oc*, and *sì*. But if they differ on this point, they agree in many others, notably in the use of a single word—*amor*—for love.

## 5. LATIN AND THE ROMANCE LANGUAGES

Coming to Italy, he finds a considerable rift between the language of *sì* as it is spoken on the right and on the left of the Peninsula. Hardly two towns have precisely the same dialect, and two streets in Bologna have dissimilar brogues. Two factors are primarily responsible for this condition of things—time and space. In the course of ages words change, and when people migrate, they acquire new habits and customs, which modify their speech. This is no doubt true, but Dante proceeds to make the strange assertion that grammatical Latin is an artificial inven-

tion, "regulated by the common consent of many nations," the object being that there might be one language, not subject to variation, which might serve as a repertory of ancient history and philosophy, and as a means of intercourse between distant peoples.

In making this statement Dante seems to have considered only the functions of Latin in his own day, although he clearly recognizes that the "invention" is very old—certainly older than the Romance languages.<sup>1</sup> But it is plain that he regarded it as having been always, like classical Greek,<sup>2</sup> a secondary form of speech, distinct from the spoken language, and a sort of adjunct of high civilization. It was therefore not identical with the single primitive language of which French, Provençal, and Italian are derivatives, and which he appears to have considered indigenous throughout Southern Europe. In the fifteenth century there was a famous controversy between Leonardo Aretino and Flavio Biondi as to the relations between classical Latin and the oral language of Rome, and the former went so far as to maintain that the gulf between them was as great as in his own day, that literary Latin was unintelligible to the plebeians, and that, when they attended the theatre, they had to be content with the spectacular aspects of a play.

This was a palpable exaggeration, but there is no doubt either that there were differences between oral and literary Latin, or that the former was the foundation of the Romance languages. Thus we find in Plautus *Scio jam, filius quod amet meus istanc meretricem*,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> i, 10.

<sup>2</sup> i, 1.

<sup>3</sup> "As." i, 1, 37.

where Cicero would have said *scio filium meum amare*. The Romance languages observe the former construction, and it is noticeable that the *grammatica* employed in this treatise contains many instances of this and similar departures from classical usage, e.g., *dicimus quod nullus effectus superat suam causam*.<sup>1</sup> Dante, too, makes *utor* govern the accusative, instead of the ablative.<sup>2</sup> These examples show that the *grammatica* of the Middle Ages is far from attaining the Ciceronian standard, but Dante does not discuss this point.

Comparing the languages of *oïl*, *oc*, and *sì*, Dante declines the invidious task of determining which of the three is the best, but he indicates the grounds on which each claims precedence. French has a monopoly of good prose; and the Arthurian romances and the gestes of the Trojans and Romans are written in that tongue. Dante describes the stories of King Arthur as a "labyrinth" (*ambages*)—a term that will be appreciated by any one who has attempted to thread his way through the "Morte Darthur," our early English version of the French romances. In the sixteenth canto of the "Paradiso"<sup>3</sup> we find the lines:

Whence Beatrice, who stood somewhat apart,  
Smiling appeared like unto her that coughed  
At the first failing writ of Guenever.

This allusion baffled the commentators, who hunted through the "labyrinth" in the hope of meeting with the original passage, and, not being successful, con-

<sup>1</sup> i, 9.

<sup>2</sup> ii, 11; but *stilo tragico uti*, ii, 4.

<sup>3</sup> ll. 13-15.

cluded that it must have occurred in some version now lost. Dr. Paget Toynbee<sup>1</sup> has traced it in a thirteenth-century manuscript of the "Lancelot du Lac" attributed to Walter Map. Another reference to the Lancelot romance may be found in the fourth book of the "Convivio,"<sup>2</sup> and a third, much more widely known, in the fifth canto of the "Inferno."<sup>3</sup>

The Provençals are recognized as having been the first to cultivate poetry in the vulgar tongue, whilst the Italians, notably Cino of Pistoia and "his friend" (*i.e.* Dante himself), have invested the art with superior subtlety and charm, and based themselves more on *grammatica*. All three languages, therefore, have plausible claims to the primacy.

## 6. THE ITALIAN DIALECTS

Leaving this vexed question undecided, Dante returns to the subject of the Italian dialects, of which he makes the Apennine range the dividing line. It will be noticed that the Oxford Dante has *fistulae culmen* in the text, with *fictile* as a suggested emendation. The latter is due to Signor Pio Ragna,<sup>4</sup> and is likely to commend itself to the majority of Dantists. The "top of a water-pipe" is obviously a much less appropriate simile than "the ridge of a tiled roof."

In all Dante distinguishes fourteen principal dialects, but these are split up into subordinate varieties, insomuch that he concludes that the total number

<sup>1</sup> "Studies and Researches," 1-37.

<sup>2</sup> C. xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> ll. 127-38.

<sup>4</sup> Or rather Professor Vitelli, who proposed it to that editor.

of diversities amounts to a thousand at least. He then enters on a quest for what he calls the "illustrious vulgar," that is to say, the type of Italian employed by the best poets. For this purpose he reviews the various dialects, beginning with the Roman, notes their peculiarities, and ultimately rejects them all. *A priori*, it might be thought that the purest Italian would be spoken at Rome, and, according to Dante, the citizens held that they were not to be touched in any sort of vernacular culture. But he quickly disposes of their pretensions, and declares their dialect the vilest jargon in Italy.

Apart from Rome, there are three quarters in which we might reasonably look for good Italian. The first artistic Italian poetry arose in Sicily, and Dante tells us that even in his day Italian verse was called Sicilian. He admits that natives of the island produced admirable poems, but they did not write in their own dialect, which he shows to be quite different from the language they employ. Another direction in which we might glance is Bologna, the birthplace of the *dolce stil nuovo*. Dante pronounces a favourable opinion on the dialect of this city, and, indeed, accords to it the highest place among the various brogues. But it is not what he is seeking—it is not the *vulgare illustre*, as may be seen by comparing the compositions of their celebrated poets—the "greatest," Guido, Fabruzzo, and Onesto—with the talk of the proletariat.<sup>1</sup>

As for Florence and the other towns of Tuscany,

<sup>1</sup> The Bolognese said *sipa* for *sì*; cf. "Inf." xviii, 61.

Dante ridicules their claims. In a previous paragraph<sup>1</sup> he had denounced the narrow patriotism which insisted that everything Florentine or Tuscan, including the language, must be best; and in chapter xii he shows no more respect for his native dialect than the Roman or any other. *Turpiloquium* ("jargon") is the term he applies to it, and on purpose to take down the pride of the Tuscans, who beat all their countrymen in their frenzied conceit, he adduces specimens of the kind of doggerel composed at Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Siena, and Arezzo. But in Tuscany, as elsewhere, there are exceptions, and he makes honourable mention of Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, and "one other," Florentines, and Cino of Pistoia, all of whom have used the *vulgare illustre*. Guittone of Arezzo, Buonagiunta of Lucca, and Brunetto Latini, on the other hand, though writers of note, are tainted with provincialism. Dante is always severe on Guittone, and later in the treatise<sup>2</sup> he again censures him for not having emancipated himself from plebeian words and plebeian constructions.

## 7. COURT ITALIAN

Having examined all the dialects without finding that any of them corresponds with the *vulgare illustre*, he concludes that the latter is the property of every city and not of any one city in particular. This may appear a fair inference from the evidence collected and set forth, but it involves a substantial, though

<sup>1</sup> i, 6.

<sup>2</sup> ii, 6.



perhaps unintentional, injustice to Tuscany. Guido delle Colonne and other elect poets of Sicily, Guido Guinicelli and the best bards of Bologna, no less than the Florentine brotherhood of the *dolce stil nuovo*, employed a form of speech that resembled Tuscan incomparably more than any other dialect. This is the more extraordinary, since the productions of the Sicilian school undoubtedly preceded the earliest attempts at poetry in Tuscany itself. What is the explanation of this triumph of Tuscan? It was due partly to the geographical conditions, the central position of the province, partly to the fact that it was a more faithful reflection of the old Latin than the other dialects, and partly, we may well believe, to the mental alertness of the people, which showed itself in politics and commerce before it was manifest in their literature. However we may choose to account for it, the fact remains that Tuscan formed the substructure and a large part of the superstructure of that *vulgare illustre*, which had already become the shibboleth of national, in contradistinction to local or provincial, poetry.

It seems singular that Dante should have been blind to a fact which no one now thinks of disputing, but, after his banishment, he cherished bitter feelings towards "the inhabitants of the wretched valley" (of the Arno),<sup>1</sup> and he had a strong predilection for "universals," which in his philosophy are not merely ideals or general conceptions, but real existences, which are distributed unequally in the members of a

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xiv, 40-54.

class, according as those members are more or less contaminated by foreign elements. The "universal" being the standard by which "individuals" are estimated, and from which they have diverged, has not only logical precedence, but priority in point of time. The various dialects are so many corruptions, not of *grammatica* or Latin, but of the *vulgare illustre* as constituting the type or norm or bond of union. Ideal Italian, as we should express it, is not only *illustre*, but *cardinale*, *aulicum*, and *curiale*, and the remainder of the first book is occupied mainly with definitions of these epithets. A thing is illustrious, which is exceptionally bright, which receives and emits light. Power renders a man conspicuous, and such a man may enlighten others by his justice and philanthropy. He is then said to be illustrious. Dante cites as examples Seneca and Numa Pompilius. Compared with the local dialects the *vulgare illustre* is in office. It possesses power, inasmuch as it is able to sway the hearts of people. The *vulgare illustre* is "cardinal," because it resembles the hinge of a door, and the whole herd of municipal dialects follow its lead. It is "palatial" also, and "courtly." These adjectives are practically synonymous in meaning, and their use is beset with some difficulty, because there was actually no single or central palace or court in Italy, as was the case in Germany. Still there existed the members of such a court in the residences of the nobility, in which, says Dante, the *vulgare illustre* was invariably spoken. Thus, although there was no Emperor having a palace at Rome, there was an idea

court, or, as it may be otherwise expressed, in Italy the court had been put into commission, but its functions continued to be discharged. It was the balance in which all kinds of performances were weighed. The term "courtly," therefore, as applied to language, has a similar scope to "King's English."

The *vulgare illustre* or *Latinum vulgare*, as he names it in the concluding chapter, is a "universal"; it is proper to the whole of Italy. Dante, however, notwithstanding his disparagement of the local dialects, is willing to accord them recognition in their respective spheres, which are of varying extent. There is a type of language common to the whole of western Italy; there are dialects proper to particular provinces, and there are forms of speech restricted to individual families. He proposes to deal with these inferior kinds, when he has disposed of the *vulgare illustre*.

## 8. LITERARY DICTION

In the second book we meet with a new system of classification, embracing an *optimum*, a *mediocre*, and a *humile vulgare*. The first is identical in all respects with the *vulgare illustre*, which, in Dante's opinion, it is becoming to use in prose as well as in verse. But there it encounters a serious and permanent obstacle in precedent. Prose-writers are under the thralldom of the "inventors,"<sup>1</sup> i.e. of the poets. Postponing this subject, Dante discusses at length the question whether all versifiers should use the *vulgare illustre*, and de-

<sup>1</sup> *Inventores* = *trovatori*.

cides in the negative. It is suitable only for those who possess learning and genius, and ought to be employed on the highest themes, viz., war, love, and conduct. Bertran de Born, Arnaut Daniel, and Giraut de Borneuil are mentioned as Provençal poets, who have excelled in these three departments respectively. Among Italians Cino of Pistoia has treated of love, and Dante himself of conduct, *e.g.*, in his poem beginning *Doglia mi reca nello corde ardire*;<sup>1</sup> but so far no Italian appears to have sung of arms.

#### 9. VERSE FORMS

The next point for consideration is the relative value of different forms of verse—the canzone, the ballad, the sonnet, and so forth. Dante holds that the first is the “most noble.” Its name shows that it is song *par excellence*, while it is complete in itself. Ballads, on the other hand, imply the accompaniment of dancing, for which they are written, and this renders them inferior to canzoni, though they rank higher than sonnets. The most treasured and most artistic of all lyrical structures, canzoni are suited for the treatment of the loftiest themes in the finest language. Many writers of canzoni, however, have not understood the principles of versification. It was otherwise with the Roman poets, who followed a code of rules, and the more closely they are imitated, the more correct will be the resultant poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Canzone x in the Oxford Dante.

## 10. STYLES

Before discussing the metre and other properties of the canzone, Dante touches on the various styles—the tragic, the comic, and the elegiac. By "tragic" he means grand and elevated; by "comic," not jocose or facetious, but comparatively simple, while "elegiac" describes the simplest and the least pretentious manner. Each style has its correspondent language. The *vulgare illustre* is the language of the tragic style, the *mediocre* or *humile vulgare* of the comic, and the *humile vulgare* of the elegiac. The relations between style and language, as regards comedy and elegy, were to have been discussed in the fourth book, which was never written. We are therefore unable to say to what extent the use of the local dialects would have been admissible in the comic and elegiac styles, but it is certain that in these the vocabulary was not so select, and a wider range of expression was sanctioned.

With reference to the tragic style, the character and limitations of its vocabulary are expounded in Chapter vii. Only stately terms are to be employed. Babyish words, womanish words, city words<sup>1</sup> are banned; and the eligible words, which survive the process of sifting, are divided into two classes—the "well-kempt" and the "rough." The former tend to be trisyllabic and euphonious, while the latter are either monosyllabic or polysyllabic. Many pronouns,

<sup>1</sup> Such terms are permissible in the "comic style": e.g., *femmina* ("Purg." xxiv, 43).

conjunctions, and interjections are monosyllabic, but they are necessary and cannot be avoided. Polysyllabic words are ornamental, and, judiciously blended with "well-kempt" terms, contribute to the harmony of a sentence, although defective in certain qualities of sound.

## 11. CONSTRUCTION OF SENTENCES

Akin to the choice of terms is their combination in clauses and sentences. This is the subject of Chapter vi, in which Dante adduces typical examples of construction in Latin. They are intended to illustrate degrees of effectiveness from a simple colloquial statement to a complex period, representing the highest rhetorical art. He then cites nine odes by North French, Provençal, and Italian poets, which attain this standard of excellence, but he counsels his readers to study the best Roman poets and prose-writers as the most useful means of acquiring the habit, and, above all things, not to be led away by perverse admiration for Guittone's grovelling style of composition.

## 12. METRE

In Chapter iv Dante uses the phrase "pride of the rhythms." In the following chapter he defines what he intends by this expression, pointing out that a great variety of metres had been in use, but none had included more than eleven or less than three syllables. The hendecasyllabic is the "proudest," as taking up most time and affording most scope for the

sentiment, construction, and words. (In Chapter vii Dante, writing of *sesquipedalia verba*, observes that a word of more than eleven syllables could not be fitted into verse. He had found one—*honorificabilitudinitate!*). The chief poets make it a rule to begin their canzoni with a hendecasyllabic line. Next in favour is the heptasyllabic metre, and the association of the two renders the verse "prouder" than the employment of either singly. Verse consisting of an even number of syllables, *e.g.*, decasyllabic, is seldom used, says Dante, on account of its rudeness, but the real reason was that the Italian language is so rich in "feminine" or double rhymes, whereas the opposite is the case with our own.

In Chapter viii Dante raises the question whether the term canzone, or song, properly applies to the words or music, and answers that it is the words that constitute the song. Other expressions are used to describe the melody, and no musician thinks of calling a tune his song, except in so far as it is wedded to words. Dante, however, seems to contemplate a musical setting as a natural, if not necessary, complement of a canzone, and indeed all kinds of lyrical poetry. A canzone consists of a series of stanzas, which must be uniform as regards the number of lines and syllables, but not as to the rhymes, which may be varied or repeated in accordance with the fancy of the poet.

The whole art of the verse-writer is displayed in the stanza, which presupposes a musical air, and is framed with a view to being sung. The scheme is subject to



variation conformably to the nature of the contemplated accompaniment. In some cases there is a single air for the entire stanza, without break or repetition. Nearly all Arnaut Daniel's canzoni are constructed on this principle, and Dante mentions his own poem, *Al poco giorno ed al gran cerchio d'ombra*,<sup>1</sup> as an example of the class. He terms the break the *diesis*<sup>2</sup> or *volta*, and tells us that this occurs at the point where one melody passes into another. Those poems which admit of a *diesis* are of three sorts, according to the manner in which they are intended to be sung. At least one of the melodies must be repeated, and the repetition may take place before the *diesis*, after the *diesis*, or both before and after. If the repetition takes place before the *diesis*, the stanza is said to have *pedes* or feet—usually two; sometimes, though very rarely, three. The rest of the stanza is then called the *syrma* or tail. If the repetition takes place after the *diesis*, the stanza is said to have *versus*, and a *frons* or forehead.

These divisions are not necessarily equal, whether as regards the number of the lines or of the syllables. Theoretically a *frons* may exceed the *versus* in lines and syllables, or it may have fewer of both, as in Dante's canzone: *Traggemi della mente Amor la stiva*.<sup>3</sup> Similarly in his canzone: *Amor, che muovi tua virtù dal cielo*<sup>4</sup> the *pedes* exceed the *syrma* in both respects. On the other hand, the *syrma* surpasses the *pedes* completely in the canzone: *Donna pietosa e di*

<sup>1</sup> Sestina i.

<sup>2</sup> In ii, 12, he calls it more correctly the *dieresis*.

<sup>3</sup> This has been lost.

<sup>4</sup> Canzone ix.

*novella etate*.<sup>1</sup> The variation arises from the length and the number of the lines assigned to each division. Thus the *frons* might consist of five heptasyllabic lines, and each *versus* of two hendecasyllabic lines. It is understood, of course, that there is an exact correspondence between the *versus*, and this is also the case between the *pedes*. Where a stanza is made up of *pedes* and *versus*, there is no limit of number. There may be several of each, and the number of *versus* need not correspond with that of the *pedes*.

Hendecasyllabic, heptasyllabic, and pentasyllabic lines are those which are most common; next to them comes a line of three syllables. In "tragic" poetry, as Dante has previously observed, the eleven-syllable line is most esteemed, and some canzoni, including his own ode *Donne, ch' avete intelletto d' amore*,<sup>2</sup> are hendecasyllabic throughout. It is allowable to insert one or more heptasyllabic lines in the *frons* or *syrma*, provided that the hendecasyllabic lines preponderate, and the poem begins with one. Dante is speaking of "tragic" composition, and certain exceptions to which he alludes seem to him to have a tinge of "elegy." He sanctions only one pentasyllabic line in a whole stanza, or two at most, which must be in the *pedes* to make them correspond; and he entirely excludes the trisyllabic line, except as it forms part of a hendecasyllabic line divided by an inner rhyme, as in the case of his canzone: *Poscia ch' Amor del tutto m' ha lasciato*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Vita Nuova," § xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* § xix.

<sup>3</sup> Canzone xix.

## 13. RHYME

Rhyme is quite a subsidiary feature in the canzone, and Dante proposes to defer a complete treatment of the subject until he comes to deal with ballads and sonnets. One kind of stanza has no rhyme-scheme, and he cites as an instance that used in his canzone: *Al poco giorno*. In another kind all the lines have the same rhyme. Where there is a mixture of rhymes, poets are accustomed to the fullest liberty. In certain poems all the endings are not rhymed in the same stanza, but where that is not the case the rhyme is completed in other stanzas. Gotto of Mantua, of whose compositions Dante speaks highly, invariably left one line in a stanza unrhymed, and this he called the key. It is permissible to treat not only one, but several lines in this way. It is the general rule, however, that no line should be without its fellow or fellows in a stanza.

Some verse-writers carry on the rhymes beyond the diaeresis, whilst others introduce a fresh set in the latter part of the stanza. Dante considers it an admirable plan, which is very commonly adopted, to rhyme the last line of the former part with the first line of the latter. As regards the *frons* or *syrma*, the order of the rhymes is indifferent, except, of course, that the order of the rhymes in the first stanza must be maintained in the others. He recommends that poems conclude with a couplet. In the case of the *pedes*, if one of the lines is left unrhymed in the former, the rhyme is supplied in the corresponding line of the

latter; otherwise the rhymes of one *pes* may be repeated in the other, or not, at the poet's discretion, provided that the same order is observed. If, for instance, the first and last lines rhyme in the first *pes*, the first and last lines in the second and succeeding *pedes* must likewise rhyme. The same rule applies to the verses except for the modification that may be necessary for a couplet ending. Three faults are to be avoided. One is excessive reiteration of the same rhyme. Dante himself has exemplified this repetition in his poem: *Amor tu vedi ben che questa donna*,<sup>1</sup> but in that instance he holds it to be justifiable on artistic grounds. The same poem might have been cited in illustration of the second fault, which is the rhyming of a word with itself. The third fault is the use of harsh rhymes, though they may be occasionally employed for the sake of variety.

In the fourteenth chapter Dante enters upon the consideration of the length of the stanza. This he makes dependent on the subject-matter. Poems of a pleasant or persuasive nature demand a longer stanza than satirical pieces. At this point the treatise breaks off. It is possible that Dante intended to include in this section some remarks on the *tornata*, or concluding stanza, which was sometimes of the same construction as the preceding stanzas, but more often not. In his reference to the couplet it might have been expected that he would have stated that it is commonly found in an irregular *envoi*. The first line of the *tornata* is frequently not rhymed, especially

<sup>1</sup> Sestina ii.

when it ends with *donna* or *donne*—it may be, in order to emphasize those words; and the *tornata*, when irregular, was briefer than the regular stanzas, sometimes consisting of only three lines.

It will perhaps facilitate the understanding of Dante's account of the stanza, if we present the three types in tabular form, as is done in Mr. Chaytor's excellent introduction of the "Troubadours of Dante."<sup>1</sup>

I		II	
1st line	} Pes.	1st line	} Frons.
2nd „		2nd „	
3rd „, etc.		3rd „, etc.	
1st line	} Pes.	DIESIS OR VOLTA	
2nd „		1st line	} Versus.
3rd „, etc.		2nd „	
DIESIS OR VOLTA		3rd „, etc.	
1st line	} Syrma or Cauda	1st line	} Versus.
2nd „		2nd „	
3rd „, etc.		3rd „, etc.	
		III	
		DIESIS OR VOLTA	
1st line	} Pes.	1st line	} Versus.
2nd „		2nd „	
3rd „, etc.		3rd „, etc.	
1st line	} Pes.	1st line	} Versus.
2nd „		2nd „	
3rd „, etc.		3rd „, etc.	

#### 14. THE SESTINA

It seems desirable also to supplement Dante's unfinished treatise, as far as is necessary in order that

<sup>1</sup> P. xxx.

the metrical forms, other than the canzone, that we find him to have employed, may be comprehended. And first we may notice that Dante practically identifies the sestina, except as regards rhyme, with the canzone proper, but the way the rhymes are arranged makes it appear a different kind of verse. Actually, as he says, there are no rhymes, but it is convenient to use the term with respect to the words which supply the place and fulfil the purpose of rhymes. The description, sestina, is due to the stanza consisting of six lines, but one of Dante's compositions has twelve lines, and is therefore a double sestina. Arnaut Daniel made constant use of this form in Provençal, and Dante introduced it into Italian—a fact on which he seems to have prided himself, although the innovation was by no means felicitous.

In lieu of rhymes the same words are repeated in different lines of the stanza on the principle of change-ringing. The number of stanzas is regulated by the number of "rhymes," and, apart from the *tornata*, the position of each "rhyme" is never the same in any two stanzas. In the case of the double sestina the same "rhyme" is repeated in successive lines, thus constituting an approach to a rhyme in the common sense of the term, or what the Italians called a *rima equivoca*. The principles of these two sorts of sestina will be best understood by comparing the following schemes with Sestina I and Sestina II.

## SESTINA I

## STANZAS

LINE	1	2	3	4	5	6	TORNATA
1	1	6	3	5	4	2	1
2	2	1	6	3	5	4	6
3	3	5	4	2	1	6	3
4	4	2	1	6	3	5	
5	5	4	2	1	6	3	
6	6	3	5	4	2	1	

## SESTINA II

## STANZAS

LINE	1	2	3	4	5	TORNATA
1	1	5	4	3	2	1
2	2	1	5	4	3	5
3	1	5	4	3	2	4
4	1	5	4	3	2	3
5	3	2	1	5	4	2
6	1	5	4	3	2	
7	1	5	4	3	2	
8	4	3	2	1	5	
9	4	3	2	1	5	
10	1	5	4	3	2	
11	5	4	3	2	1	
12	5	4	3	2	1	



In addition to what has been already stated, it is essential to observe that in both schemes the last "rhyme" of the preceding stanza is always the first of the succeeding one, and that the "rhymes" of the *tornata*, as far as it goes, are, after the first, those of the last lines in order. The second scheme is obviously far more intricate than the first, and that for two reasons. Each line contains a series of "couplets," mingled with single lines, and, while the "rhymes" vary in every instance, the positions assigned to "couplets" and single lines respectively, are unalterable. Then, again, each of the "rhymes" has an "innings" in one stanza, in which it recurs more frequently than any other rhyme. The total number of lines is sixty-five, and each rhyme-word is used thirteen times. The sestina was, therefore, a severe test of mechanical ingenuity, particularly in the double form.

### 15. THE BALLAD

The ballad was a dance-song, and began with the *ripresa* or refrain. This was followed by two *pedes* and a *volta*. Strictly speaking, the two *pedes* should correspond as in the canzone, whilst the *volta*, as regards its form, should reproduce the *ripresa*. Several of Dante's ballads violate one or other of these principles. In Ballad I<sup>1</sup> the *volta* is irregular, since the first and last lines do not rhyme as in the *ripresa*. It is easy to see that this arose from the competition of another principle—that of concatenation. It will be

<sup>1</sup> "Vita Nuova," § 12.

remarked that the last line of the second *pes* rhymes with the first line of the *volta*, thus linking the two divisions of the stanza. Ballad II, though shorter, is similarly constructed. Ballad III is regular, as is also Ballad IV, in which the first lines of the *ripresa* and of each *volta* are unrhymed. Ballad V is constructed like Ballads I and II, while Ballad VI is regular. Ballad VII is extremely irregular both as to the *pedes* and a *volta*. Even here, however, the tripartite character of the stanza may be recognized, since the *pedes*, though uneven, are contained by the same rhymes, and there is a *volta* which, like the *ripresa*, consists of four lines. But the *volta* has two heptasyllabic lines, whereas the *ripresa* has one only. This circumstance suggests a wholly different analysis of the ballad, and on further inspection it will be noticed that the *ripresa* corresponds with the first *pes*, and that the last ten lines of the stanza compose two divisions, which are similar in all respects, and are evidently intended as *versus*. The first four lines, therefore, constitute the *frons*. Thus we seem to have an example of a transposed *volta* immediately following the *ripresa*, or we may say that the ballad consists of two *pedes* and two *versus* without a *ripresa*, except as the *ripresa* is identical with the first *pes*. Ballad VIII is regular, if the variation of a heptasyllabic line may be disregarded in the first *pes* of each stanza. It may be remarked that the first line of the *volta* rhymes with the second of the first *pes* and the third of the second *pes*, while the rhymes of the second and third lines do not vary. Ballad IX resembles Ballads I, II, and V; and this

is likewise the case with Ballad X. Judging from the apparent necessity of concatenation, and the fact that Petrarch also uses the same type of ballad, all five may be accounted regular, together with Ballads III, IV, and VI. This leaves Ballads VII and VIII, of which the former is totally unlike the remainder, while in the latter uniformity is sacrificed to rhythm. All the ballads, without exception, exhibit internal consistency, and all but one approximate to an identical pattern.

#### 16. THE SONNET

The general structure of the sonnet is well known. It is a short poem consisting as a rule of fourteen lines, and divided into an octave and sextain. The octave again is divided into quatrains, and the sextain into tercets. The number and order of the rhymes in the quatrains tend to be invariable;<sup>1</sup> they run *abba* | *abba*. In the tercets, on the other hand, there is considerable diversity. Sometimes there are three, sometimes only two rhymes. Dante's sextains comprise six different rhyme-schemes, viz.: *cdccdc*, *cdcdcd*, *cdccdc*, *cdcdce*, *cdeede*, and *cdecde*. The first is the order of the rhymes in Dante's first sonnet, and there the consecutive *c* rhymes may be due to the tendency to link transitional lines. A similar purpose was served by alternate rhymes, which are believed to have been originally

<sup>1</sup> In early examples the octave has alternate rhymes; nine of Dante's fifty-four sonnets (VIII, IX, X, XIV, XVI, XXIX, XXXIII, LII, and LIII) are of this type.

the rule in the octave as well as the sextain, the sonnet, according to the most probable account, having been compounded of popular *strambotti* identical in form, but differing in length. The ballad also was of popular origin, and Dante, it will be remembered, associates the two as inferior types of poetry as compared with the canzone. The third scheme is the worst in every sense. Not only are the *d* rhymes huddled together, but the sonnet ends in a couplet, which is an unsuitable conclusion for a languishing love-poem, besides falsifying the division of the sextain into tercets. Strange to say, this form of the sonnet is used freely by Dante, but, after some search, we have met with but one instance in Petrarch, whose favourite schemes are the second, fourth, and sixth in the above list. The most artistic is undoubtedly the fourth, since the couplet is avoided, and yet the tercets are effectively linked by the quick return of the *d* rhyme. Not many of Dante's sonnets are of this type.

In the "Vita Nuova," two sonnets—II and IV—exceed the usual limit. Both consist of twenty lines, six heptasyllabic lines being intercalated, two in each quatrain and one in each tercet. Bartoli calls this kind a *sonetto rinterzato*, but, according to Carducci's definition, it is a *sonetto doppio*, since it lacks an extra hendecasyllabic line in the sextain. The ordinary sonnet is composed of hendecasyllabic lines throughout.

### 17. TERZA RIMA

The metre of the "Commedia" is *ternario incatenato*—that is to say, it consists of *terzines* or tercets, with

the rhymes so disposed (*ababcbcdc*) that there is no necessary break before the end of the canto, which is marked by a quatrain obtained by the omission of the second and third lines of the tercines. Dante is supposed to have adapted this metre from the four-line stanza of the popular *serventese*, which was used especially for moral and political themes, as well as for enumerations. By its transformation into tercines embodying the precious principle of concatenation, he was able to extend the sentence from three to six, nine, or twelve lines without violating any natural pause.

## 18. POETS

## LIST OF POETS CITED IN THE "DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA," WITH APPROXIMATE DATES

*North French*

Thibaut, Count of Champagne (1201-1253), King of Navarre (1234-1253).

*Provençal*

Peire d'Alvernhe, *floruit* 1150-1180.

Bertran de Born, b. *circiter* 1140—d. *circiter* 1210.

Giraut de Bornelh, *floruit* 1165-1220.

Arnaut Daniel, *floruit* 1180-1200.

Folquet de Marselha, *floruit* 1180-1195.

Aimeric de Belenoi, *floruit* 1200-1250.

Aimeric de Pegulhan, *floruit* 1205-1265.

*Italian*

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| Guido delle Colonne, d. very old, 1287 (?)          | } Sicilian.                |
| Rinaldo d' Aquino, <i>floruit</i> 1227-1254.        |                            |
| Guittone d' Arezzo, b. <i>circiter</i> 1220,        | } Peninsular.              |
| d. 1294.  |                            |
| Buonagiunta da Lucca, alive in 1296.                |                            |
| Gallo d'Agnello, Pisan, alive in 1275.              |                            |
| Mino Mocato (or Meo Macconi), of                    |                            |
| Siena.  |                            |
| Gotto, of Mantua.                                   |                            |
| Ildebrandinus, of Padua, alive in 1292.             | } Bolognese.               |
| Guido Guinicelli, b. <i>circiter</i> 1230, d. 1276. |                            |
| Guido Ghisilieri, b. <i>circiter</i> 1244.          |                            |
| Fabruzzo, <i>floruit</i> 1274-1294.                 |                            |
| Onesto, rather later.                               |                            |
| Brunetto Latini, 1220-1294 or 5.                    | Franco-Italian.            |
| Guido Cavalcanti, 1255-1300.                        | } <i>dolce stil nuovo.</i> |
| Cino da Pistoia, b. before 1270, d. 1336-7.         |                            |
| Dante Alighieri, 1265-1321.                         |                            |

PART III  
POLITICAL





## CHAPTER I

### THE "DE MONARCHIA"—PRELIMINARY

#### I. EVOLUTION

IN previous sections we have had occasion to make various allusions to Dante's political opinions. We have seen that his family was Guelf, that his native city was Guelf, and that he himself was originally of that party. We have also observed that his views gradually changed, and that, without becoming a Ghibelline in the strictest sense of the word, he co-operated with the Imperialists in attempts to overthrow the Neri *régime* established at Florence. Del Lungo, therefore, proposes to call him a *guelfo imperialista*. This seems to be an unnecessary refinement, especially when we consider that Dante eventually, and in no long time, severed his connection with the allied Ghibellines and Bianchi, and impartially denounced both older factions.

To the public standard one the yellow lilies  
Opposes, the other claims it for a party,  
So that 'tis hard to say which sins the most.  
Let, let the Ghibellines ply their handicraft  
Beneath some other standard; for this ever  
Ill follows he who it and justice parts.

And let not this new Charles e'er strike it down,  
 He and his Guelfs, but let him fear the talons  
 That from a nobler lion stripped the fell.<sup>1</sup>

This passage illustrates very well what Dante meant when he said that he became a party by himself. He was an Imperialist, but an Imperialist, to use his own philosophic distinction, *simpliciter*, not in the corrupt, degenerate Ghibelline sense, which allowed of a noble principle being prostituted to base ends, local or personal.

## 2. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE "DE MONARCHIA" AND OTHER WRITINGS

The "Commedia" does not refer specifically to any of Dante's earlier writings, though his use of the phrase *vita nuova* in the "Purgatorio" is a near approach to naming the work that bears that title. Witte interprets *lo bello stilo* in the first canto of the "Inferno,"<sup>2</sup> as an allusion to the "De Monarchia," as written in Latin, but the German scholar is certainly mistaken. Dante speaks of the *dolce stil nuovo*. The "Commedia," however, contains various passages that may be looked upon as echoes of the treatise. One of the most striking is to be found in the sixteenth canto of the "Purgatorio,"<sup>3</sup> especially the lines:

Hence it behoved laws for a rein to place,  
 Behoved a king to have, who at the least  
 Of the true city should discern the tower

. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> "Par." vi, 100-8.

<sup>2</sup> l. 85.

<sup>3</sup> ll. 84-112.

Rome that reformed the world accustomed was  
Two suns to have, which one road and the other,  
Of God and of the world made manifest.

It is in the "Paradiso," however, that we meet with the largest number of coincidences. Canto VI is entirely occupied with a speech of Justinian, in which he recounts the glorious history of the Roman people and empire, as a sacred institution, much in the same way as it is described in the second book of the "De Monarchia," and, we may add, in the fourth book of the "Convivio." Mention should be made also of the manœuvres or evolutions of the blessed spirits in the heaven of Jupiter, of which an account is given in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth cantos of the "Paradiso." They, by their motions, first spell the text: *Diligite justitiam, qui judicatis terram!*<sup>1</sup> Then they form themselves into a great "M," the initial letter of *Monarchia*, after which there is a rearrangement, and some of the spirits compose the head and neck of an eagle, whilst others first "bloom a lily on the M," and subsequently complete the beautiful image of the sacred bird. The lily is the *fleur de lis*, and is emblematical of the French princes of Italy, who are here taught the lesson of subordination to, and unity with, the central and universal power of the temporal monarch.

The eagle speaks,

And utters with its voice both *I* and *My*,  
When in conception it was *We* and *Our*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wisdom of Solomon, i, 1.

This, and the perfect discipline manifested in the harmonious groupings, furnish a picturesque commentary on Dante's definition of concord in the "*De Monarchia*." "Concord," he says, "is the uniform motion of many wills, and all concord depends on unity, which is in wills."<sup>1</sup>

Quite early in the treatise Dante lays it down that monarchy or empire is necessary for the peace of the world, and secures, rather than suppresses, individual freedom. Thus, "the ensign of the world and of its leaders" having become "silent in the blessed beak,"

Those living luminaries all  
By far more luminous, did songs begin,  
Lapsing and falling with my memory.<sup>2</sup>

The substance of the first two books of the "*De Monarchia*" is presented in the "*Convivio*,"<sup>3</sup> only more briefly and for another object, the intention being to demonstrate that the Emperor's authority does not extend to philosophic questions, such as the nature of nobility. No mention is made of the "*De Monarchia*," whence we may assume that the latter work was not yet in existence, nor even contemplated, since the "*Convivio*" alludes to "*Vita Nuova*" as already completed,<sup>4</sup> and the "*De Vulgari Eloquentia*" as projected.<sup>5</sup> The account in the Italian treatise, therefore, has the appearance of being a slight sketch afterwards expanded in a more formal manner. On the other hand it is conceivable that the paragraphs in

<sup>1</sup> i, 15.

<sup>2</sup> "Par." xx, 10-12.

<sup>3</sup> iv, 5.

<sup>4</sup> i, 1.

<sup>5</sup> i, 5.

the "Convivio" are a summary of facts and conclusions related in more detail in an earlier Latin writing. In the "De Monarchia," Dante accepts a definition of nobility, which he rejects and puts himself to some trouble to disprove in "Convivio," just as in the "Paradiso" he combats an explanation of the spots in the moon received in the "Convivio." A similar consideration leads to the conclusion that the "De Monarchia" was written after Epistle V, since, as was pointed out, Dante there admits the justice of the comparison of Pope and Emperor to the greater and lesser lights of the firmament, which in the "De Monarchia" he denies. But there are allusions in Book IV of the "Convivio," which show that it was produced before 1310. On the whole, therefore, the tendency of this evidence is to suggest that the "Convivio" was the prior work, and that the "De Monarchia" was not composed until 1311 or later.

### 3. DATE OF THE "DE MONARCHIA"

That the nature of the relations between ecclesiastical and temporal authority was much in Dante's thoughts about 1311 is proved by Epistle VI,<sup>1</sup> in which we have a fourth statement of his political opinions. Boccaccio, indeed, asserts as a fact that the "De Monarchia" was written on the occasion of the Emperor Henry's descent into Italy in 1311, but this may have been mere conjecture. Witte maintains that the treatise was composed before 1301, partly for the

<sup>1</sup> P. 43.

reason that, unlike Dante's other works, it contains no reference to his exile. The phrase *expellunt fratres*, however, seems as if it might be a reproach.

Curiously enough, in a large majority of the MSS., there is inserted in I, 12, after the words *a Deo collatam*, the remarkable statement *sicut in Paradiso Comediae jam dixi*. Dante is speaking of freedom, which he describes as the greatest gift bestowed by God on man. In the fifth canto of the "Paradiso,"<sup>1</sup> he affirms this proposition in the following terms:

The greatest gift that in his largess God  
 Creating made, and unto His own goodness  
 Nearest conformed, and that which He doth prize  
 Most highly is the freedom of the will,  
 Wherewith the creatures of intelligence  
 Both all, and only, were and are endowed.

The correspondence, therefore, is exact, and if we could but be sure that the words *in Paradiso Comediae* are genuine, and not interpolated, we should be constrained to assign the composition to the very close of Dante's life. But the words do not appear in *all* the MSS., nor in the early editions. Thus it is probable that, as Witte suggests, they were inserted by "some curious reader of the 'Paradiso'"; and they will be sought in vain in the "Oxford Dante," which has simply *sicut dixi*.

The reading in II, 1 (l. 27), has some bearing on the date. Witte has *et unico suo Romano Principi*, the "Oxford Dante" *et uncto Romano Principi*. The latter is almost certainly right, the phrase being a resumption

<sup>1</sup> ll. 19-24.



of the quotation from Psalm II, with which the book opens. But Dante would not have applied the term "anointed" to Rudolph, Adolphus and Albert, whom, in the fourth book of the "Convivio," he refuses to acknowledge. He did recognize Henry VII; and, as the advent of that monarch furnished an excellent motive, it is likely that Boccaccio was correct as to the date of the treatise.

#### 4. SUBJECT

Dante treats of what was still a burning question. It is true that he says in the "Purgatorio"<sup>1</sup> that one sun has quenched the other, and that he calls Frederick II—in the "Convivio"<sup>2</sup>—the last of the Roman Emperors, but during Dante's lifetime neither he nor the Ghibelline party abandoned hope, and the expedition of Henry VII, though abortive, must of necessity have had a quickening effect on the spirits of the Imperialists, at least for a time. The "De Monarchia" is a logical exposition of the principles on which the cause rested. The inquiry is threefold. First, whether monarchy (or empire) is indispensable to the well-being of the world. Secondly, whether the Roman People has rightfully assumed the office of monarchy. Thirdly, whether the authority of the monarch depends immediately on God, or on some vicar of God. To each branch of the inquiry Dante devotes a separate book, and the object of the whole is to show that, in temporal matters, the Emperor is independent of the Pope.

<sup>1</sup> xvi, 109.

<sup>2</sup> iv, 3.

## 5. OBLIGATIONS

Dante states that he has undertaken a task not yet attempted by any one, and this is doubtless true in the sense that he was not aware of the existence of similar treatises. Much, however, of his historical and geographical information, as well as certain of his ideas, was derived from the "Ormista" (or "Ormesta") of Orosius, a Spanish priest born at Tarragona about the end of the fourth century, to whom he points in the tenth canto of the "Paradiso"<sup>1</sup>:

Within that other little light is smiling  
The advocate of the Christian centuries,  
Out of whose rhetoric Augustine was furnished.

Towards the close of Book I Dante makes a good deal of the fact that there was universal peace at the time of Christ's nativity, and that our Lord was enrolled as a Roman citizen. Orosius is equally insistent on these circumstances, which he regards as evidence that Rome was specially favoured by God. It is from the pages of Orosius that Dante proves that Mount Atlas is in Africa,<sup>2</sup> and they are also the source of the allusions to Ninus and Semiramis,<sup>3</sup> the achievements of Vesoges, King of Egypt, and his failure to subdue the Scythians,<sup>4</sup> and the fight between the Horatii and Curatii,<sup>5</sup> though here Dante cites Livy in addition.

In ii, 9, Dante makes a strange slip. He states that Alexander sent envoys demanding the submission

<sup>1</sup> ll. 118-20.<sup>2</sup> ii, 3.<sup>3</sup> ii, 9.<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>5</sup> ii, 11.

of the Romans, but died before receiving the answer, and names Livy as his authority. Livy, however, declares that Alexander was not known to the Romans even by repute.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Toynbee has discovered the origin of the story in the chronicle of Bishop Otto of Friesing—a work with which Dante seems to have been acquainted, since Ennius's lines cited in II, 10, though derived ultimately from Cicero,<sup>2</sup> are also quoted by Otto. But Otto records that Alexander died at Babylon, whereas Dante tells us that the great conqueror met his end in Egypt. How are we to account for this? The truth is, Dante confused the ancient Babylon with Old Cairo, which also went by that name. In the fifth canto of the "Inferno,"<sup>3</sup> he says of Semiramis:

She held the land which now the Sultan rules,

*i.e.* one of the Mameluke Sultans. Dr. Toynbee aptly compares Mandeville:

"The Lord of Babyloyne, where the sowdan dwellethe comonly . . . is not that great Babyloyne, where he Dyversitie of Langages was first made . . . when he grete Tour of Babel was begonnen to ben made."

<sup>1</sup> ix, 18.

<sup>2</sup> "De Officiis," i, 2.

<sup>3</sup> l. 60.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "DE MONARCHIA"—THE ARGUMENT

#### I. CHARACTER OF THE WORK

THE "De Monarchia" is remarkable for its strict adherence to dialectic form. It is a model of syllogistic reasoning with an elaborate system of major and minor premises that is bound to excite awe and admiration on account of its intricacy and precision. If men could be ruled by logic, and theories were not upset by the defects inherent in human nature, and revealed by history, there would be little to urge against the ideal government delineated in this treatise. It is, however, unpractical, because it ignores the necessary consequences of extraordinary individual capacity and the national sentiment, the rivalry of races. Dante does not recognize that the world advances by the hard path of competition between persons and peoples, and that ambition, in one form or another, is the mainspring of progress. The adoption of a world-wide benevolent despotism would soon reduce humanity to a stagnant civilization comparable to that which has for ages prevailed in China. While Dante pleads for universal peace as a

consummation devoutly to be desired, he seems to forget that the Roman People, which, as he shows at considerable length, developed its power and demonstrated its fitness for empire in a long course of wars and conquests, palpably degenerated when the bracing conditions of military service no longer called their primitive virtues into exercise. Most people will sympathize with his vigorous protest against the intrusion of ecclesiastical rule into the secular domain; at the same time, we have to remember that the interposition of the spirituality often, in barbarous ages, secured justice for defenceless and innocent persons who would otherwise have succumbed to the brute force of feudal superiors. The “*De Monarchia*” is so colourless, so abstract in character, so wanting in the generally inevitable allusions to contemporary men and manners, like the astonishing outburst in the “*De Vulgari Eloquentia*,”<sup>1</sup> that, did we not possess Villani’s and Boccaccio’s testimony, a doubt might have been pardoned as to whether the treatise is authentic. But, however much a writer may aim at scientific detachment, he cannot escape from the conditions of his own experience of life. Considered in this light, the “*De Monarchia*” represents a revolt from the tyranny of faction, the dishonest intrigues, the shameless bargains of Popes and Cardinals, and the aggrandisement of the Royal House of France. These monstrous growths had affected Dante adversely, and the only remedy he could find for them was the reanimation of the corpse of Empire. The “*De Monarchia*” is, in fact, a glorified

<sup>1</sup> i, 12.

pamphlet, redeemed from oblivion by the distinction of its author and, more precariously, by the union of imposing principles with close and cogent argumentation.

## 2. NECESSITY OF EMPIRE

At the outset Dante defines temporal monarchy, or empire, as a single princedom, to which all are subject, and which is exercised in and over things measurable by time. He then distinguishes between theoretical and practical sciences. In the former category he places mathematics, etc.; in the latter, politics, as being concerned with action. Every operation implies an end or object. What is the peculiar operation of mankind in general? It is the exercise of reason, first, for the attainment of theoretical knowledge, and, secondly, for the application of that knowledge either in the field of action or in that of art or manufacture. The end, as he tells us later, is happiness. No individual is able to bring to bear the sum total of intelligence, nor is any single community, owing to the multiplicity of objects on which it is expended. Just as the individual can best attain perfection in prudence and wisdom when least disturbed, so the most favourable condition for the entire race in the performance of its work is universal peace. That this condition may be realized there must be a regulative intelligence, viz., an Emperor, who stands in the same relation to mankind in general as a father to a family. Individuals and individual states are parts of a whole, and must be subordinated to a single

prince. Mankind is part of a universal system of which God is the comptroller, and the greater the harmony that exists between the parts of which mankind is composed, the more perfect the correspondence between mankind and the whole of which it is part. God said "Let us make man in our own image." God is one, and mankind can only become one by being subject to one prince.

Mankind is the offspring of Heaven, which is regulated in all its parts by a prime mover, namely, God. A son behaves best when he follows in the footsteps of a perfect father, and Heaven is "very perfect." Therefore mankind is at its best when regulated by a single prince. (The process of generation is described in detail in the twenty-fifth canto of the "*Purgatorio*,"<sup>1</sup> and the birth of the human soul in the sixteenth canto of the same cantica.<sup>2</sup>)

Where princes are of nearly equal power there may be strife. In these circumstances there should be a judge with a jurisdiction exceeding that of the litigants, and this judge will be the monarch or emperor. Justice is defined as a certain straightness or rule which is most effective when it contains the least admixture of its opposite. The desire to be just is not sufficient; the power must be present also. The monarch is not only the most desirous of justice, but the best able to enforce it. There is nothing to excite his avarice since his jurisdiction is bounded by the ocean, whereas one single kingdom is coterminous with another.

<sup>1</sup> ll. 34-76.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 85-90.



Just as avarice obscures justice, so love promotes it. It seeks the good of man, and man's highest interest is to live in peace. The monarch possesses love or right affection in a higher degree than anybody else, because it is natural to love a thing in proportion to its nearness. Men are nearer to the monarch than to other princes. They are his immediate care, and he is the universal source of well-being. Other princes are concerned with the happiness of the race only through him.

Mankind is best off when most free. Freedom springs from free-will—one of those attributes that differentiate men from brutes, which are the creatures of appetite. Man, on the contrary, first perceives a thing, then decides whether it is good or bad, and finally pursues or avoids it, according to the opinion he has formed of it. The exercise of freedom is most possible under a monarch, for then mankind exists for its own sake. Other forms of government deflect from the straight line, and some of them reduce men to slavery. A monarch wishes for all men to be good. In an ill-conducted state a good man may be a bad citizen, but in well-governed communities a good man and a good citizen are one and the same, and those in authority exist for the weal of the people. As regards the means, they may be masters, but, in respect of the end, they are servants, and the monarch, without doubt, is the servant of all.

He who is best ordered for ruling can best order others. It is an error to suppose that a man can educate others in morals and conduct by good words,

whilst himself indulging in bad actions. But what security is there that a monarch is virtuous? The answer lies in the circumstances. There is nothing, or very little, to tempt his avarice, and it is avarice, more than anything else, that corrupts justice and judgement.

It is better that mankind should be ruled by one supreme prince, since, if the same object can be achieved by one instrument rather than several, the employment of several instruments is superfluous, and superfluity is abhorred by God and nature. A straight road to one's end is better than a crooked one. For all that, there must be a diversity of laws, customs, tribunals, suited to local needs, and these cannot emanate from the monarch. The monarch's function is to rule mankind in conformity with laws common to all, and lead it in the direction of peace.

Philosophy and Scripture both prove that unity is the root of good, multitude of evil. Concord is the uniform motion of several wills, and the root of concord is the unity of wills. The human race in its best state is a kind of concord, but this supposes one dominant will for the ordering of others—the will of a single prince.

Since the fall of Adam there never was universal peace save when the world was subject to a monarch, the Emperor Augustus, and there was a perfect monarchy. St. Paul's phrase, "fullness of time," signifies that no ministry of our happiness lacked a minister. From this imaginary picture of earthly felicity Dante turns to upbraid the human race

fatal waywardness, and concludes a peroration of great power and eloquence by recalling the language of the psalmist: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

### 3. THE ROMAN EMPIRE OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT

The second book commences with a quotation from Psalm ii, which Dante applies to a state of things obtaining in his own time, when kings and princes agree only in resistance to the Lord and His anointed, the Roman Emperor. Formerly, on a superficial view of the subject, he had held that the Roman people owed its position not to right, but to might. On deeper study, he had been led to attribute its pre-eminence to Divine Providence.

There are three stages in the production of a thing. First, there must be the intention of the craftsman; secondly, the tool; and, thirdly, the matter which is shaped by art. So it is in nature. God is the artificer, heaven (commonly termed nature) is the instrument, and human society the matter. The two former are perfect, and if there is any defect in the product, it must be imputed to the matter. On the other hand, any excellence must be set down to the agent and instrument, matter being good only potentially. (This account is contradicted in the thirteenth canto of the "Paradiso,"<sup>1</sup> in which imperfection in the stellar influences is recognized. According to the latter version, human bodies were created by the immediate action

<sup>1</sup> ll. 52-85.

of God only in Christ and Adam; this, however, is quite consistent with what is said here and in Book I.)

Starting from these premises Dante defines right as the Divine will or intention which is expressed in exterior facts. That the Roman People assumed the office of monarchy by right, not usurpation, is shown in the form of a syllogism. It was meet that the noblest people should be set over all others; the Roman People was the noblest; therefore it was meet that the Roman People should be set over all others. Aristotle defines nobility as virtue and ancient riches; Juvenal, as virtue simply. A large part of the second book is occupied with evidence adduced from mythology and history, the object being to establish the minor premise that the Roman People was the noblest, whether regard be had to its origin and antecedents, or to its moral standards and conduct.

The Roman People obtained supremacy by success in war, and that was a mark of Divine sanction. Other powers—Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia—had striven for universal dominion and failed, just as competitors were beaten in the Olympian games. By the judgement of God the palm in this supreme contest fell to the Roman People, and therefore the Roman People acquired empire rightfully. What is gained by war is gained rightfully, because war is an infallible method of ascertaining the Divine judgement. Inequality in the strength of the parties does not signify, for God aids the weaker side, as in the case of David and Goliath. Victory being accepted as the

test of right, Dante has no difficulty in showing that Rome, from the very beginning, extended her empire by the sword.

Thus far, the contention has been based on rational principles. Dante concludes with an appeal to the principles of the Christian faith. In doing so, he cannot resist the temptation of reproaching his opponents with their inconsistency. Notwithstanding their professed zeal, they look on whilst the poor of Christ are defrauded. The revenues and even the lands of the churches are appropriated, but the executor of justice—the Emperor—is not admitted. There is justice in the spoliation. The Church has made such an ill use of her property that it is well it should return whence it came. Reverting to the argument—the fact that Christ chose to be entered in the census list of the Roman Empire, demonstrated the justice of the decree of Augustus. The decree could not be just unless issued by lawful authority, and if the Roman Empire did not exist rightfully the sin of Adam was not punished. Punishment is not suffering merely, but suffering inflicted by one possessing the right of punishment. In this case a regular judge was a judge who had jurisdiction over all mankind, since all mankind was punished in Christ's flesh. Tiberius, whose vicar was Pilate, would not have had jurisdiction over all mankind if the Roman Empire had not existed rightfully. It was for this reason that Herod, knowing not what he did, delivered Christ to Pilate, Herod's jurisdiction being confined to a single kingdom.

#### 4. PAPAL PRETENSIONS BASELESS

Like the second, the third book begins with a quotation from Holy Writ. This time the text is taken from Daniel, vi, 22: "He hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me, forasmuch as before him righteousness hath been found in me." This is followed by a period of extreme eloquence, in which Dante assumes the position of a protagonist of the truth. The questions discussed in the previous books were largely academic; he now enters the arena of practical politics, and he seems to have felt that, in controverting the pretensions of the Papal See to temporal supremacy, he incurred some personal danger. He divides his opponents into three classes: the Pope and the clergy, influenced by religious zeal; certain others, calling themselves sons of the Church, who, actuated by base motives, gainsay the principles expounded in all three books of the treatise; and the Decretalists, who attach excessive importance to ecclesiastical traditions.

One of the arguments commonly adduced in support of Papal supremacy was derived from the story of creation, when God made two lights, "the greater to rule the day, and the lesser to rule the night." In reply Dante cites St. Augustine to the effect that not all passages of Scripture are susceptible of allegorical as well as literal interpretation. Sun and moon were created before the fall of man, and ecclesiastical and civil governments were designed as remedies against

sin. Thus Moses could not possibly have intended the words to be construed in this sense.

Saul was deposed by Samuel, but Samuel did not do that on his own authority as God's vicar. He merely served as a messenger charged with the Lord's command. The Magi's offerings of frankincense and gold did indeed signify spiritual and temporal authority, but God and the vicar of God are not equivalent. As for Christ's saying to Peter, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven," it is pointed out that in a later chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, and also in St. John's Gospel, the speech is addressed to all the Apostles. Moreover, it has to be considered in relation to the context. Christ had just said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven," and the term "whatsoever" is limited in its application by this reference. Finally, with regard to Peter's statement, "Behold, there are two swords here," which some understand of two kinds of rule, it is merely evidence of the Apostle's impulsiveness. (The reader may advantageously compare the chapter on "The Misinterpretation of Scripture," in Hobbes's "Leviathan," Part IV.)

Dante then deals with Constantine's donation. He asserts that it was possible neither for Constantine to alienate, nor for the Church to receive, the dignity of Empire. Church and Empire rest on different foundations. The foundation of the Church is Christ, that of the Empire human law. It is contrary to human law that the Empire should act suicidally. The emperor, as such, could not make a donation which implied a



diminution of his jurisdiction, for, if one emperor might do this, another might, and so it would come to pass that the jurisdiction would be destroyed. The Church, too, is prohibited by its Founder from receiving temporal gifts. God's Vicar may not possess property; he can only act as steward of the fruits of property on behalf of the Church, and for the good of Christ's poor.

The argument from history: Charlemagne received his crown from Pope Hadrian, but usurpation does not constitute right. If so, it could be proved that the authority of the Church depended on the Emperor, Otto having restored Pope Leo and deposed Benedict, whom he banished to Saxony. The argument from philosophy: All the members of a class are reducible to some one member as standard. All men are of one class; the Pope cannot be reduced to any other member, and therefore the Emperor must be reduced to the Pope. Reply: It is one thing to be a man, and another thing to be a pope, just as it is one thing to be a man, and another thing to be a father or master. In so far as they are men, both Pope and Emperor are reducible to the best man, whoever he may be, as the measure and pattern of all others. In relation to their offices they are entirely distinct. The Pope is not Emperor, and the Emperor is not Pope. Hence they are reduced to that in which they admit of being united. Papacy and Empire are relative forms of superiority; they must be reduced to absolute superiority. This will be God or some being lower than God, of whom superiority is the differentia.

Having disposed of the errors of others, Dante gives his own views of this third question. He holds that the authority of the Empire cannot be derived from that of the Church, because the former was in full exercise when the Church either did not exist or was not putting forth its power. What is the point of St. Paul's appealing to Caesar? Again, if Constantine had no authority over the Church, he could not lawfully assign to her portions of his imperial patrimony.

If the Church had the power of giving authority to the Roman Empire, that power must have been derived from God, from itself, from some emperor, or from the universal assent of mortals or of the majority of mortals. From none of these sources can such power have been derived. Alike under the Old Dispensation and the New the priests were set apart from secular cares. The Church could not impart to herself what was not hers. The Emperor was debarred for the reasons already stated, while all the inhabitants of Asia and Africa, together with the majority of Europeans, detested the principle of Papal supremacy. It is contrary to the nature of the Church, and cannot be included amongst her powers. Christ said to Peter, "Follow me"; He also said, "My Kingdom is not of this world."

Man alone occupies a position midway between things corruptible and incorruptible, and shares the nature of both. He is ordained to a twofold end—temporal happiness and eternal felicity. To attain the former, he must employ the teachings of philosophy; to arrive at the latter, spiritual teachings, acting in

obedience to the three theological virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity. It is the function of the Supreme Pontiff to conduct mankind to life eternal according to revelation; that of the Emperor to conduct it, by the light of philosophy, to temporal happiness, by repressing greed and making it possible for men to live in peace and freedom. God chooses the Emperor; the so-called Electors merely proclaim Divine providence. If they disagree, it is because all or some of them are so blinded by self-interest as not to discern the face of Divine dispensation.

Imperial authority, then, the temporal authority of the monarch, is immediately derived from the source of all authority. But it does not follow that the Roman Prince is in no wise subject to the Roman Pontiff, since mortal happiness is ordained to everlasting felicity. Therefore let Caesar observe toward Peter the reverence that a first-born son ought to show to his father.

## 5. POSTSCRIPT

Among Dante's minor works will be found in the Oxford edition a treatise entitled "*Quaestio de Aqua et Terra*." There are no early MSS. of this treatise, and partly for that reason it has been rejected by most Dantists as a sixteenth-century forgery. Rather recently, Dr. Moore,<sup>1</sup> the editor of the "*Oxford Dante*," has championed its authenticity, and now eminent scholars either accept it or hold judgement in suspense.

<sup>1</sup> "*Studies*," pp. 303-74.

Dr. Paget Toynbee concurs with his fellow Oxonian in deeming it a genuine work of Dante, only corrupt in its present form. Certainly, any one fresh from the reading of Dante's other writings must be struck with the general resemblance of thought and style, and it is hard to believe that a mere imitator can have been so steeped in Dante's characteristics as to produce such an impression. For example, we have just quitted the "De Monarchia," totally unlikely as regards subject, and yet in Section XIII of the "Quaestio de Aqua et Terra," we meet with a repetition of the argument that what can be done by means of one instrument is better so accomplished than by means of several.

The treatise is not strikingly original—many of its features had already appeared in Brunetto Latini's "Trésor." It was therefore in no way an important contribution to the scientific knowledge of the age, and Scartazzini's wild contention that it is too much in advance of the time to be genuine may be easily disproved. He urges that the connection between the moon and the ebb and flow of the tide cannot have been known to Dante, whereas it was known to Pliny, not to mention Albertus Magnus and Vincent de Beauvais, mediaeval philosophers, to whom Dante was indebted for much of his information. And a reference to the sixteenth canto of the "Paradiso" (ll. 82-3) shows conclusively that he *did* know it. Mediaeval notions of cosmography, however, differ so fundamentally from the discoveries of modern science that the treatise cannot be properly under-

stood without some initiation into that interesting subject, to which attention will be paid later.

The origin of the work was a disputation at Mantua as to whether water in any quantity is anywhere higher than the uncovered portion of the earth. The topic was afterwards resumed in the chapel of St. Helena at Verona on 20th January, 1320, and Dante here presents the arguments *pro* and *con*. One of those in proof that the sea is higher than the land is that sailors can see the land from the mast when it is invisible on deck. Dante, in reply, attributes this effect to the interruption of the view caused by the convexity of the earth. Another argument is that water flows *down* from mountains in the beds of rivers. Dante's answer is that water rising in elevated places is carried thither in the form of vapour. If water were higher than land the world would be elliptical, like the moon, or the sea would somewhere form a hump on the circumference. Dante maintains that the world is a perfect sphere, except for a hump that is formed not by the sea, but by the land. The emergence of land from the face of the deep is ascribed to the influence of the fixed stars,<sup>1</sup> but Dante recognizes that there is a difficulty. As the heaven of the fixed stars is circular, the dry land ought also to be circular, which it is not. Dante can only account for this discrepancy by supposing deficiency of material. Realizing,<sup>4</sup> however, that this will inevitably lead to a succession of such questions the solution of which will be difficult, if not impossible, he falls back on various texts which con-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Par." ii, 64.

vict persons of a too inquiring turn of mind of presumption.

The "Quaestio de Aqua et Terra" is full of interest as marking the limitations of so great a man as Dante in regard to matters of which his authorities could furnish no explanation based on sound principles. It is true that ultimately all knowledge comes to us through the medium of the senses, but the axiom that nothing is true that contradicts sense, applied in so inelastic a manner as we find here, was the chief bar to progress in what he terms "speculation." Since Dante agrees that water is a nobler element than earth, and that it is permissible to make certain deductions from this superiority, it is evident that another obstacle was a confusion of physics with ethics or politics.

BOOK II

INNER LIFE AND ITALIAN WRITINGS

PART I

MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL





## CHAPTER I

### THE "VITA NUOVA"

#### I. TITLE

THE story of Dante's inner life is begun in the "Vita Nuova," continued in the "Convivio," and completed in the "Commedia," and thus the three works together have been regarded as a trilogy. In addition to these longer writings there is a number of canzoni, ballads, and sonnets, which will be best discussed after the "Vita Nuova."

The title "La Vita Nuova" is capable of two-fold interpretation according to the meaning attached to the word *nuova*. It may refer to the poet's youth. To this explanation it has been objected that the period of youth does not commence at the age of nine, and that Dante nowhere employs the Latin word *novus* in the sense of "young." But Dante was not compelled to recount the whole of his youthful experiences; he even apologizes for narrating as many of them as he does. If, too, he does not use the Latin word *novus* with the signification of young, he certainly employs the Italian words *nuovo* and *novello* in that sense.<sup>1</sup> The subject of the book is youthful

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Canzone ii, 1 ("Vita Nuova"), Ballad vi, 1.

emotion, and that being so, we may well anticipate a relationship between subject and title. The opinion that the word *nuova* connotes, if it does not denote, youth is borne out by what is said elsewhere as to the distinctive qualities of the "Vita Nuova" and the "Convivio," which are attributed to the different ages at which they were written.<sup>1</sup> The former is as redolent of youth as the latter of maturity.

The other explanation regards *nuova* as signifying "regenerate," and for this also much is to be said. St. Paul, *il gran vasello del spirito santo*, in whose epistles, as is shown by numerous citations, Dante was profoundly versed, speaks of "newness of life." This interpretation is in harmony with the language used in § XI, Canzone I, and Sonnet XI; and in the thirtieth canto of the "Purgatorio" (l. 115), Beatrice refers to the *vita nuova* as a time of moral rectitude, in which Dante was supported by her eyes, before he yielded to temptation. In an ethical or spiritual sense the expression *vita nuova* does not mean the life following reformation or conversion, such as is adumbrated towards the close of the book, but rather a quickening or consciousness of the better nature that the soul has brought with it from God.

Heaven lies about us in our infancy.

The two senses, therefore, do not seem to us mutually exclusive. They are reconciled in the familiar phrase "the age of innocence." Dante was only eight when he first fell in love.

<sup>1</sup> "Convivio," i, 1.

## 2. DATE

The date of the "Vita Nuova" is approximately determined by the testimony of Dante himself. He informs us that it was written "at the entrance of his *gioventute*." In the "Vita Nuova," he uses the similar term *gioventudine* in the most general sense of youth, but this is not the sense in which *gioventute* is employed in the "Convivio," in which he divides human life into four ages, and defines *gioventute* as the period extending from a man's twenty-fifth to his forty-fifth year.<sup>1</sup> According to this reckoning the "Vita Nuova" was written in 1290 or 1291. This is consistent with the indications of time that we find in the book itself. Thus we learn that Beatrice died on 9th June (or on the night of 8th June), 1290; that on the anniversary of her death he was engaged in drawing angels when he was interrupted by the arrival of certain gentlemen; that some time afterwards he beheld a young and beautiful lady gazing pitifully at him from a window and formed an attachment to her; that this attachment lasted "certain days," and that then he had a vision of Beatrice, which caused him to repent of this passion and resume his former devotion. All this may have happened before the end of the year 1291, and Dante may have signalized his repentance by inditing the "Vita Nuova."

On the whole, we do not feel justified in setting aside Dante's plain statement respecting the time at which the "Vita Nuova" was composed, but there

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." iv, 24.

are difficulties in the way, and the question is greatly complicated by the sophistries in the "Convivio" which contains a new version of the later incidents.<sup>1</sup> Dante's second attachment is described as commencing between two and three years after the death of Beatrice, and as not being completely established for another thirty months or more. How long it continued is not recorded, but, judging from the period of incubation, the term of Dante's second love, his defection from Beatrice, might be measured by years, not, as in the "Vita Nuova," by days. Finally, we have to take account of the season of contrition mentioned in the "Vita Nuova," which preceded its composition, and may also have been of some duration. Basing our calculations on this evidence, the "Vita Nuova" may have been written in the year of Jubilee—1300. By that time Dante would no longer have been at the entrance of his *gioventute*; he would have been half through it—*nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*.

Which of the two versions is to be preferred, or are there any means of reconciling them? Before we can answer these questions, we must seek to determine which of the two books is the more historical. The "Convivio" professes to be the more solid production, and, wherein it differs from the earlier work, to present the literal truth, the prose of the matter. But it must not be forgotten that the "Convivio" was written for a purpose and in a style that inevitably raise suspicions of disingenuousness. On the other hand, the "Vita Nuova," though incomparably more simple, is

<sup>1</sup> ii, 13.

not free from traces of artificiality. It would seem that both in the "Vita Nuova" and the "Convivio" Dante introduces as much of the fictitious element as suits his immediate purpose. In the former, where the rival of Beatrice is a woman, he has clearly an interest in not prolonging his infidelity beyond certain days; in the latter, where that rival represents a course of severe study, he has not less clearly an interest in extending the term to months and even years. From an historical or biographical standpoint there is apparently little to choose between the two works, if we admit a groundwork of facts. Those who hold that the "Vita Nuova" is, in the main, "a cunningly devised fable" will, of course, find it easy to accept this proposition.

Believers in the humanity of Beatrice will naturally lean to the "Vita Nuova" as the more primitive and also the more complete relation. The earlier work overlaps its successor at each end, and for this reason Carducci styles the "Convivio" an "episode" of the "Vita Nuova." In other words, the "Vita Nuova" enshrines a spiritual phase posterior to that of which the "Convivio" is the memorial. In § XL Beatrice regains her lost ascendancy—when? Upon this point Dante vouchsafes no definite information, but the final chapters of the book are saturated with the twin conceptions of pilgrimage and vision. Dante beholds certain pilgrims journeying to Rome to gaze on the Veronica, and straightway he is inspired to write two sonnets, in one of which—the last in the "Vita Nuova"—he likens the sigh that escapes him to a

pilgrim-spirit that passes to highest heaven, and there sees Beatrice.

In the "Oxford Dante," as in other recent editions, *va* is substituted in § XLI for *andava* and the parenthesis in which this emendation has been made is now interpreted as alluding to the time of the year—January or Easter—when the Veronica was exhibited, as was done annually. The other reading would point to some special occasion, and this is conjectured to have been the Jubilee of 1300, of which Villani writes: "For the consolation of the Christian pilgrims every Friday, or solemn day of festival, the Veronica or the napkin of Christ was displayed in San Piero. Wherefore a great part of the Christians who were then alive made the said pilgrimage, both women and men, from diverse and distant countries, both near and far."<sup>1</sup>

Even if we read *va* it is by no means certain that Dante was not thinking of this memorable time when the immense concourse of pilgrims drawn together from all parts of Christendom was calculated to beget reflection. Dante does, in fact, pause in his narrative and goes out of his way to discriminate between different sorts of pilgrims. Evidently the topic seemed interesting and important, but if the pilgrimage was ordinary, and the "Vita Nuova" was finished in 1291, the digression seems somewhat odd in that work, though it is much what we should expect in the "Convivio," in which Dante enters with infinite zest and considerable particularity into all manner of lore.

<sup>1</sup> viii, 36.



The pilgrimage, it appears to us, was not ordinary. It coincided with, and virtually suggested, the plan of writing the "Commedia," the fundamental idea of which is a pilgrimage to the City of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Throughout the poem Dante consistently adheres to the year 1300 as the date of the vision, later events being represented as still future. Dante's conversion, his reunion with Beatrice, took place in the same year, since they form part of the action of the poem, and the meeting between the lovers after a severance of ten years is touchingly depicted in the thirtieth and thirty-first cantos of the "Purgatorio." If this recovery, this reconciliation, occurs in 1300 in the "Commedia," it is reasonable, and almost necessary, to believe that the passage in the "Vita Nuova" was written not earlier than that year.

Once accept this conclusion, and the rest is easy. Dante is converted—he returns to Beatrice. He is then impressed with the spectacle of pilgrims faring to the sight of the "blessed image." Then a sigh, a pilgrim thought wings its flight to the vision of the glorified lady. But the vision is not perfect, and Dante fails to comprehend it. He is not yet fully enlightened. A perfect, a wondrous, vision succeeds, which he does comprehend, but for its adequate setting forth time and trouble are needed. If the rival was indeed philosophy, Dante must have meant not so much the studies of which there is such ample evidence in the "Convivio," as the "poetic pains" to be lavished on the "Commedia," which has an apparatus of learning not less imposing than that of the prose work, while

the poem made far heavier demands in the way of imaginative power and mechanical execution.

Scartazzini denies the identity of the concluding vision of the "Vita Nuova" with that of the "Commedia," arguing that it was one of those inspirations got by the poet from Beatrice that produced no lasting effect. This is to run counter to the significance of Dante's language as well as to ignore the character of the vision, in so far as it can be inferred from the context.

The notion of a pilgrimage not only to the celestial regions, but also to the abode of lost souls, had already germinated in Dante's mind at the date of the "Vita Nuova." In the second stanza of Canzone I, God is made to say, with reference to Beatrice, in addressing the saints and angels:

"My beloved, suffer now in peace that your hope be, whilst it please me, there where is one that looks to lose her, and shall say to the evil-born in Hell: 'I saw the hope of the blessed.'"

Scartazzini concedes that the concluding sections of the "Vita Nuova" may have been a later addition. If so, Dante may have retouched at the same time earlier portions of the work so as to make them anticipatory of his final resolution. On this assumption we have a parallel case to the prophecies sown through the "Commedia"—prophecies after the events. It is true that the saying "I saw the hope of the blessed" is not to be found in the "Inferno," but no one imagines that the "Vita Nuova" was completed after the first *cantica* of the "Commedia." It may, however,

and probably did, assume its present shape when Dante was on the threshold of his great undertaking, and then, it would seem, the second stanza of Canzone I was interpolated, or the entire poem recast.

There are other reasons for suspecting that the "Vita Nuova" was completed and revised in 1300. Bartoli<sup>1</sup> is much perplexed by Dante's allusions to Guido Cavalcanti, who died 27th or 28th August, 1300, and confesses himself unable to determine whether they were written during the lifetime or after the death of the poet's principal friend. As an escape from the difficulty he suggests tentatively that Dante retouched his book. These allusions, be it observed, occur not at the close, but in the body, of the work. Moreover, those digressions on popular poetry, the personification of love, and the different classes of pilgrims are not consonant with a treatment which Dante describes as "fervid and passionate." They smack of the schools, and seem to belong to the period that gave birth to the "Convivio." The same remark applies to the amazing chronological references, which imply abstruse study, and are the first fruits of the harvest more fully garnered in the later works.

On the other hand, the "Vita Nuova" contains numerous passages which appear much more likely to have been penned in the fever of youth than at a time when Dante was a married man and a responsible and prominent citizen. Not only so, but we have his own statement that the book was written "at the entrance of his *gioventute*." These considerations prevent

<sup>1</sup> iv, 211-2.

us from yielding to the temptation, undoubtedly strong, of referring the entire work, with the exception of most of the poems, to the year 1300.

What happened may have been this. Soon after the anniversary of Beatrice's death Dante chose out certain of his lyrics and strung them together with simple explanations in prose. Years elapsed, during which his mind was occupied with other matters, war, matrimony, study, politics, and so forth, and he developed into what is termed a man of the world. In 1300 he became disillusioned, disgusted with life, and returned to the point of view associated with his love for Beatrice. He began to contemplate the "Commedia." By way of preparation he revised the "Vita Nuova," which experienced the reflex influence of his later studies, was brought into line with them, and partially reconstructed.

### 3. DEDICATION

The "Vita Nuova" is preceded by no formal dedication that has come down to us, and it is not until we arrive at § xxxi that we meet with an intimation that it was addressed to any one in particular. There, however, we find Dante saying: "And I know that my first friend, to whom I write this, had a like intention." His first friend was Guido Cavalcanti, as is shown by the allusions in § xxiv. Dante, it will be remarked, says "*had*," not "*has*"; and similarly in § xxv, in referring to Cavalcanti, he uses the past tense—"and this my first friend and I well *knew* of those who rhyme thus stupidly." On the other hand,

in § III, he employs the present tense—"whom I *call* the first of my friends"—and in the sentence above quoted, he says "to whom I *write* this."

This evidence is not exactly contradictory, but it is woefully inconclusive, since the statements are equally intelligible, whether we assume Cavalcanti to have been alive or dead. Thus, in the last instance, Bartoli suggests that the "Vita Nuova" is inscribed to Guido's memory; and that when Dante tells us that he calls Cavalcanti the first of his friends, this may be simply an acknowledgement of what the elder poet had been to him. It is quite possible that he may allude to the encouragement received from Cavalcanti on the occasion of his first essay in poetry, and that *primo* may signify first in point of time. Or, again, Dante may be stating a rule consistently observed in the "Vita Nuova," where he always speaks of Cavalcanti in those terms. In either case, the past tense would naturally have been employed in speaking of old days and former talks. A candid perusal of § XXIV would lead us rather to judge that Cavalcanti was not then alive, as the same motives that caused Dante to suppress certain expressions, in which Guido figured in the secondary character of a precursor, would have operated still, were that friend yet living. At the same time it does not seem probable that Dante dedicated the book to Guido's memory. It is more likely that he addressed it to him in an earlier immature form, of which the clause "to whom I write this" is a trace, and that, in retouching or recasting the work, he omitted to alter *scrivo* to *scrissi*.

## 4. METHOD

The method of the work, which Pio Rajna considers to have been suggested by the *razos* and biographies of the troubadours, is well described by Boccaccio, who states that Dante collected "certain little works, such as sonnets and canzoni, which he had made at sundry times previously in rhyme, writing above each separately, and in order, the causes that had moved him to make them, and placing after the poems the divisions of the preceding works."

In other words we have here a series of poems purporting to have been written at critical moments in Dante's psychological history, and arranged in chronological sequence. Each of these poems is introduced by a prose preface that describes its setting; and to each is subjoined an analysis in which Dante lays bare the workings of his mind, the hidden springs of the poem, and brings out its full import. It is thus, at any rate, that the work sets out, but Dante fails to maintain the order. In the earlier sections the analysis follows the poem; in the later it is appended to the preface. Here and there, in both the earlier and the later sections, it is omitted as not being required for the comprehension of the poem. The dividing line is § XXVIII, which contains the fragment of a canzone. Being imperfect, this could not be subjected conveniently to an anatomical process; and the original rule, once broken, was not afterwards resumed in the same form. The "Vita Nuova" includes several chapters wholly in prose, which are either

expansions of the narrative, or elucidate certain difficulties involved in the style or subject.

Dante himself furnishes no scheme of the work in its larger aspects, but eminent authorities—Carducci, D'Ancona, Witte, Cassini, etc.—are in substantial accord as to the main divisions into which it is naturally resolved. Excluding the proem, there are five parts. Part I treats of love in the romantic sense, and the poet's sedulous efforts to disguise his attachment; he is under the spell of the physical charms of his lady (§§ 1-XVII, 1274-1287). Part II is more mystic; thoughts of love are wedded to premonitions of death and eternity (§§ XVIII-XXVIII, 1287-1290). Part III records the sense of desolation consequent on the death of his lady (§§ XXIX-XXXV, 1290-1). Part IV relates the episode of the gentle lady, whose sympathy awakens his affection (§§ XXXVI-XXXIX, 1291, 1291-3 or 1300). Part V tells of a vision of Beatrice in all her youthful beauty, and describes Dante's repentance, and his high resolve to do honour to her memory (§§ XL-XLIII, 1291, 1294, or 1300).

## 5. THE NARRATIVE

The narrative is uncommonly simple. Dante begins by stating that before he had quite completed his ninth year he fell in love with a girl a few months younger. Nine years to a day from that occasion he fell in love with her for the second time, and he marked the event by sending an original sonnet to all the most famous poets then alive, evoking various



replies. The vehemence of his emotions produced bad effects on his health, and his friends became solicitous about him, but he steadfastly refused to disclose his secret. It so happened that, being at church, he observed a lady sitting in a direct line between himself and Beatrice, who returned his gaze—a fact remarked by many others. Dante then resolved to make use of her as a screen; and, in order to aid the deception, addressed a number of poems to her. Her departure from Florence was a great embarrassment to Dante, who wrote a mournful ditty on the subject, though in reality he was thinking of his sad case in relation to Beatrice. Then a young lady, a friend of Beatrice, died, and Dante indited two sonnets, in which he lamented her untimely fate, and upbraided “villain Death.”

Some days later it fell to his lot to travel in the direction of the city in which the “lady of defence” had taken up her abode. He was full of regrets at leaving the lovely land in which Beatrice dwelt, and his thoughts kept reverting to the past. Hence, although in the midst of a large company, he sighed and sighed again. In the course of this journey it came to his knowledge that the “lady of defence” was not to return to Florence, and he there and then decided on a substitute—a gentlewoman of the city, who was well known to him. The experiment proved disastrous. Dante played his part so thoroughly that a scandal arose. Beatrice withheld her salute, and the object of his attentions was annoyed. In these circumstances Dante deemed it his best policy to make what

may be termed an oblique avowal. He imagined that Beatrice had already an inkling of the true state of the case, and that an assurance of his love and fidelity would rectify matters. He therefore indited a ballad in this sense, and, it must be supposed, contrived by some means that it should come into her hands, but he does not say this—only that he wrote it. The ballad is given in the "Vita Nuova," and it will be noticed that in it Beatrice is not mentioned by name. Possibly it may have been put into general circulation, in the hope that Beatrice might see it and conjecture that she was the lady intended. Not unnaturally Dante was beginning to have his doubts regarding the blessedness of love.

Soon after he received a visit from a kindly-disposed person, who persuaded him to accompany him to a brilliant wedding-feast. He was about to place himself at the service of the ladies, when he was suddenly overcome by a strange trembling, and, raising his eyes to see if anybody noticed it, beheld Beatrice. Thereupon he fell into a swoon, which provoked the mirth of the fair spectators—Beatrice amongst the rest; and his well-meaning acquaintance came forward and drew him away. Dante was a puzzle to himself. If, he asked himself, Beatrice only mocked his pain, why should he desire to see her? The ladies were equally perplexed and begged him to tell them what he wanted, as he could not support her presence. Dante's reply was that all he had wanted was her greeting. In that all his happiness had lain, and it had been the end and aim of all his desires. Now,

however, love had placed all his happiness in something that could not be taken from him—the praise of his lady. From that hour Dante resolved to devote himself to this one theme, and the first fruits of this resolution was that magnificent ode, “Ladies that have intelligence of love.”

Dante now began to be famous, and a friend having consulted him, as an authority, about the nature of love, he responded in a philosophic sonnet, in which he confirmed Guinicelli's interpretation of the mystery in general. This was followed by another, wherein he sounded the praises of Beatrice, and testified that love inspired by her was altogether blessed.

In no long time Beatrice's father died. Dante did not witness her grief, but he saw the reflection of it in the sorrowful eyes of certain ladies, who had been to visit her; and he also overheard their conversation. Dante was so stricken by the blow that his appearance was entirely altered. A grievous malady seized upon him, and in his feebleness the thought occurred to him that sooner or later Beatrice must die. Upon this he became delirious, and saw horrible visions of dishevelled women, who told him *he* would die. Then others appeared, who told him he was dead. His mind continuing to wander, he thought the sun was eclipsed, the stars changed colour, the birds fell dead, as they were flying through the air, and there were exceeding great earthquakes. Then a friend came to him in his dream with the news that his lady had departed this life.

Dante fancied he saw a multitude of angels bearing

the soul of Beatrice, in fashion as a little cloud of purest whiteness, up into heaven, and that he went to behold the body. Dante's sister was at his bedside, and, thinking his tears were caused by his infirmity, began to weep in sympathy. This attracted the notice of other women who were in the room; and, having led her away, they awoke him just as he was on the point of exclaiming "O Beatrice, blessed art thou!" He, however, could say no more than "O Beatrice," and this was not understood by the women—his voice was so broken with sobbing.

Having recovered somewhat, Dante composed a second great ode, "O lady pitiful and of tender age." He regained not only his health, but his spirits, and imagining that he saw first Love, then Giovanna (or Primavera), Guido Cavalcanti's friend, and finally the wondrous Beatrice coming towards him, wrote a sonnet on the two marvels and their herald. Dante was delighted to find that his lady was so generally beloved that people ran to see when she walked abroad, and spoke of her as an angel and a heavenly miracle. Her very presence was a benediction, and those ladies who were privileged to be her companions shared her virtue and the homage that was paid her. Dante would fain have described his new temper of mind, and began a canzone, in which he contrasted his former woes with his present state of happiness and contentment. He had only completed the first stanza when the righteous Lord called the most gentle Beatrice to glory. Dante refrains from dwelling upon her decease for three reasons, all of which appear

singular. The theme did not sort with the intention of the work as stated in the proem, it was too difficult, and it would have entailed self-praise—conduct which he strongly reprehends in the “Convivio.”

The light of his lady’s presence having been withdrawn, the city seemed widowed and desolate, and Dante bewailed its condition in a Latin address to the princes of the land, beginning with the first verse of Lamentations, which serves also as an introduction to this portion of the book and to Epistle VIII. Dante does not embody this address in his text, since he and Cavalcanti had agreed that the work should be written wholly in Italian, but he rendered a tribute of sorrow to his lost Beatrice in a canzone full of exquisite pathos. In the preface he explains why he departed from the practice he had hitherto observed of making the analysis follow the poem—it was that the ode itself, wanting this customary addition, might produce an impression of bereavement.

Dante’s best friend after Cavalcanti, who, from the language employed, must have been Beatrice’s brother, now approached him with a request that he would write something on a lady who had recently died. A sonnet and a short canzone of two stanzas were offered to him, the former wholly, and the latter partially, expressive of Dante’s sentiments towards the dead Beatrice.

On the anniversary of his loss Dante was drawing an angel, when he was surprised by some gentlemen, who watched what he was doing. He rose and welcomed them, and after they had gone away returned.

to his task of drawing angels. Then he took up his pen and indited a sonnet addressed to his visitors. The little poem, which shows that his grief was still fresh, is remarkable for its two beginnings. The phraseology of the first is very similar to that which marks the commencement of § XXIX, and it is not likely that Dante was dissatisfied with it on account of any imperfection of form. Otherwise he would not have presented alternative openings. Rather it would seem that when he had finished the composition the thought struck him that he had omitted all allusion to the occasion of it, and in order to repair this defect he re-wrote the opening quatrain.

Dante was most desirous of suppressing outward signs of his agony of mind when there was a possibility of their being observed by others, but one day he became aware that a young and very beautiful gentlewoman was gazing at him from a window with an expression of the deepest pity. The poet burst into tears and hurried off, but he did not forget the look of sympathy, and argued from it that love between him and her could be only of the most noble character. They met again and again, and the poet thought he could detect in her appearance symptoms of love blended with those of pity: and the sight of the lady undoubtedly gave him pleasure. At the same time he felt a considerable measure of remorse, and upbraided his eyes for their folly and forgetfulness of Beatrice. However, the new passion continued, and Dante was plunged into what he calls a "battle of thoughts"; at one moment reviling himself for har-

bouring the idea of consolation, and then seeking to justify the attachment.

This mental strife was ended by a vision of Beatrice, as he had seen her in her youthful beauty and crimson vesture. He was shamed into penitence, and the wicked desire having been chased from his bosom, all his thoughts were turned once more to his own most gentle lady. As the consequence the reign of tears and sighs began again.

After passing through this period of tribulation, Dante observed a number of strangers in one of the principal streets of Florence. They were pilgrims on their way to look upon the Veronica at Rome, and, being such, it occurred to him that they were not likely to have heard of Beatrice and the grievous calamity that had befallen the city through her death. He therefore wrote a sonnet, ostensibly to enlighten them. Then two ladies sent to request a copy of the poem. Dante had so high an opinion of them that he composed another—the twenty-fifth in the book—and presented them with both sonnets, together with the one he had written at the desire of Beatrice's kinsman. Finally, there appeared to him a wondrous vision, to which, in the present state of his attainments, he felt himself incapable of doing justice. Accordingly he resolved to say no more of Beatrice until, by devoting his whole powers to study, he was able to say of her what had never been said of any woman. Dante concludes with a prayer that his soul may go to behold the glory of his lady, the blessed Beatrice.



## 6. SIGNIFICANCE

Before dealing with special features of the work, it is expedient that we ask ourselves, what does it signify as a whole? Is it pure allegory, or is it, as we have assumed, a record of actual experiences? The "Vita Nuova" has been termed "a spiritual romance," and Bartoli and others insist that Beatrice was no maiden of flesh and blood, but a personified abstraction. Just as Dante explains that the lady with whom he consoled himself was really philosophy, so they would have us believe that Beatrice was just *donna*—the idea of womanhood.

One is constrained to allow that the narrative contains a great deal that must strike one as improbable and fictitious. Such, for example, is Dante's account of his sensations when he fell in love at the age of eight. Here he is obviously transferring to his childhood the reflections of later years. He anticipates what is to follow, not in his thoughts at the time, but in his subsequent version of the affair. His extreme youthfulness as a lover has been made the subject of scepticism, but Lord Byron was still younger—only six—when he first experienced the sentiment. So far as it goes, therefore, this precocity on Dante's part strengthens the theory of Beatrice's reality, as the touch was needless, and even foolish, if there was no foundation of fact. One point on which Bartoli enlarges is the series of coincidences connected with the number nine. His argument is not convincing. In some cases the coincidences may have been genuine,

whilst in the others Dante has to exercise considerable ingenuity in order to reconcile dates with a mystic principle.

No doubt the "Vita Nuova" lends itself to allegorical interpretation. We may, if we choose, conceive of it as a parable of the vanity of earthly wishes, the failure of human aspirations, even the best. For Dante aspires, he does not attain. If it be granted that the greeting of Beatrice is attainment, as in a sense it is, Dante forfeits it; and so, however we regard the matter, the notion of discomfiture pervades the narrative until we approach the close, where the peace of God, expectation of final reunion, and the promise of rare poetical achievement, introduce a note of happiness, and even triumph.

It is remarkable that in his rationalistic "Convivio" Dante nowhere hints that Beatrice was aught but what she appears, and very few, we imagine, who have perused the "Vita Nuova," uninfluenced by the metamorphoses of its sequel and the common but erroneous belief that in the "Commedia" Beatrice symbolizes bare theology,<sup>1</sup> will question that, however curious they may find the story, it is based on actual occurrences. This conviction is due to the passion and pathos that inform the majority of the poems, as well as much of the prose. Common sense rebels at the suggestion that all this exaltation and despair were evoked by nothing more tangible than a mental image of impossible perfection—cold, lifeless, statu-

<sup>1</sup> Beatrice, of course, does symbolize theology, but she represents much besides—notably love and compassion.

esque. As to that, Beatrice, as she is depicted to us, is by no means a being of absolute perfection, since she derides Dante's insupportable misery. Naturally, this circumstance has proved a stumbling-block to the idealist school of interpreters. Doubtless an image existed in Dante's mind, and he yielded to the illusion that the object of his affection corresponded with the flattering portrait. All lovers do.

Beatrice then was a real Florentine maiden, and this was probably her right name. Dante observes in his poem that she was called Beatrice by many who could only *call* her so, *i.e.* they did not comprehend that the name was an accurate symbol, that she was indeed *beatrix*, the bestower of blessing. Had "Beatrice" been merely a *senhal*, similar to those employed by the troubadours in addressing their mistresses, Dante would hardly have spoken of "many"; he would have said "by me," or, at most, "by me and my friends." Moreover, in Sonnet XIV he uses the abbreviated form *Bice*, which is evidently a pet name.<sup>1</sup> Guido Cavalcanti was certainly an historical person, and in § XXIV we read of his friendship with a lady named Giovanna, a famous beauty who was called Primavera (Springtide) on account of her charms. In the sonnet referred to the ladies are mentioned together as "Monna Vanna" and "Monna Bice." If Beatrice had been a fanciful appellation like Primavera, Dante would hardly have written in this colloquial strain, in which he turns to account an incident of common life.

<sup>1</sup> See also "Par." vii, 14.

The poet, we hold, idealizes an affair of the heart, not of the intellect, employing for the purpose the most imposing language, and elevating the whole chapter of events into the pure atmosphere of religion. Nothing can exceed the ease, the grace, and the refinement of Dante's lyrics, which assume the form of long-drawn-out musical sighs or rapturous acclaim of his lady's transcendent virtues. Save in the first sonnet, there is not a touch indicating consciousness of the lower corporeal pleasures, but alike in the poetry and in those passages of the prose that are poetry in all but name, there is intense feeling rising at times to ecstasy. The spontaneity that marks these compositions is traceable to the conditions in which they were produced. Like the "fiery tears" of St. Lawrence that shoot across the autumn sky, they were thrown off when the parent substance was at white heat; and it is to this quality of luminous and condensed emotion that they owe—as Dante was well aware—their specific excellence.<sup>1</sup>

### 7. THE PORTINARI TRADITION

It is sufficient in one sense to believe that Dante's lady was a living, breathing woman, for this obviates the stultification involved in the opposite theory—that the stress of passion was caused by a sublimate of femininity! We may not, however, ignore the fact that Boccaccio claims to have ascertained from a trustworthy person the identity of that wonderful lady.

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxiv, 49-59.

She is said to have been the daughter of a Florentine gentleman, Folco Portinari, and married to Messer Simone de' Bardi. Confirmation of this story has been found in the "Codex Ashburnham" of the commentary of Pietro Alighieri, Dante's son, but this may have been interpolated, whilst Boccaccio's evidence is regarded by many high authorities with suspicion. But it so happens that in this instance it does not lack some sort of corroboration. There is no question whatever of the existence of Messer Folco di Ricovero Portinari and his daughter Beatrice, or Bice, nor yet of the marriage of the young lady with Messer Simone. These facts are established by Portinari's will, dated 15th January, 1288. It is known also that he died on 31st December, 1289, and that the Alighieri and Portinari families occupied adjoining houses. The last circumstance would account for the early intimacy between Dante and Beatrice; and the date of Portinari's death harmonizes very well with the record in the "Vita Nuova." The work shows that, after years of the strictest secrecy, Dante's love for Beatrice was common knowledge at Florence—at any rate, in the circle in which they both moved; and there is every reason to suppose that so interesting a tradition would have been handed down to succeeding generations in the way Boccaccio describes.

But Beatrice's marriage with Simone de' Bardi has been considered to constitute a grave obstacle to the acceptance of her identity with the Beatrice of the "Vita Nuova." One of the sanest critics of recent years, Herr Karl Federn, holds it to be impossible

that the object of Dante's passionate devotion can ever have been wedded. It would have been too great a shock for his sensibilities, and had such an event occurred he must have mentioned it. This, however, is not so certain; indeed, it must be evident on reflection that he could not mention it in view of the fact that he could not bring himself to renounce his affection for her, whether alive or dead, and cherished her memory to the last, as the most precious of all earthly possessions. Dante, as we have seen, denies himself the melancholy satisfaction of recording the details of Beatrice's death as contrary to his purpose. Mention of her marriage would, it may be thought, be still more contrary to his purpose, it would be downright bathos. Still, it is possible that he alludes to it, though with studied obscurity. There is a wedding in the "Vita Nuova"; is it quite inconceivable that it was that of Beatrice herself? Dante, being an old friend of the family, may have been invited, and found himself unable to decline the hateful and terrible ordeal, with consequences similar to those portrayed in the work. The *gabbo* may have been the thoughtless raillery of the light-hearted bride and her attendants, or Dante may have intended by it the marriage itself as a culminating outrage on his feelings. If so, this would be a characteristic example of his *subtlety*—a quality on which he prided himself. The "Vita Nuova" contains a number of instances of subterfuge—of one lady being substituted for another; hence there would be no occasion for surprise if

<sup>1</sup> See especially §§ v, vii, ix.

Dante disguised the incident which terminated all his illusions.

It may seem strange that Dante should extol and glorify one who had slighted him and given herself to another. But, in the first place, there is no evidence that his affection had ever been reciprocated; and, secondly, we know nothing of the circumstances of the Portinari marriage. It may not have been a love-match, and even if it were, Dante may have asked himself what was left to him now that the contract had destroyed any hope he had entertained of wedding her. The answer was that there still remained the indestructible impression of her beautiful personality and the elevating influence of the pure and heavenly dreams associated with his worship of her. Her premature decease, wresting her from Simone, restored her as it were to Dante, to whom, after an interval of forgetfulness, she served as a perpetual inspiration, and whom he eventually canonized as one of the greatest of saints.

#### 8. BEATRICE'S RIVAL

Who was the lady whose love consoled Dante for a space? In the "Convivio" she is said to have been Philosophy, but this is manifestly an afterthought. Scartazzini will have it that she was Gemma Donati, Dante's wife, and the passage that he cites from Boccaccio lends colour to the opinion that this was also the biographer's belief. If the "Vita Nuova" represents the attachment as a transgression, the



work, according to Scartazzini and many others, was composed before Dante's marriage, and the repentance of which it speaks was repented of. As against this it must be recollected that the "*Vita Nuova*" and the "*Commedia*" are in absolute accord, so that it would be necessary to suppose a third repentance. Nowhere in his writings does Dante mention Gemma or his marriage save in this doubtful instance, and thus it appears far more likely that the reference is to some lady whom he admired and did not marry. Even in maturer life he allowed himself to be beguiled by at least one charmer.<sup>1</sup> If Gemma is intended, we can only conclude that the passage recording his repentance was written several years after the marriage, which took place in 1293 or thereabouts—a conclusion at which we have arrived on other grounds. If the relations between the pair had become strained, this would explain also why Dante, in the "*Convivio*," ascribes the warm expressions of his *Canzoni* to his love of philosophy. It might then have seemed absurd to have depicted his estranged and angry wife as consoling him. It is the general opinion, however, that Dante kept his domestic affairs to himself and abstained from obtruding them on the notice of an indifferent world.

## 9. THE PROSE STYLE

It is a well-known fact that poetry—perhaps we should say verse—always precedes prose in the literary

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 25, 26.

evolution of a language. As culture advances, the sphere of metrical composition becomes restricted to certain topics—mainly love, war, and morality, as indicated by Dante in the "De Vulgari Eloquentia." In the early periods this limitation is not recognized, and almost any topic is handled in verse form. As far as Italy is concerned, the *tenzone* may be regarded as the connecting link between verse and prose. "Often," says Gaspari, "as in most of the similar poems of the troubadours, it is a question of certain subtle distinctions in the matter of love affairs. . . . But other, and still less poetical problems, also appear in these dialogues. One asks another to resolve his doubts in scientific questions, and the Florentines, as we shall see, make *tenzoni* on political subjects too. Dino Compagni, in a sonnet, lays before a lawyer, Lapo Saltarelli, a complicated legal case, and Guittone and his imitators occupy themselves with abstruse moral and theological themes."<sup>1</sup> Now Dino Compagni and Lapo Salterello were contemporaries of Dante, who, as we have seen, makes the very true and just observation that the prose writers of the day borrowed from the poets and not *vice versa*. Prose, in fact, was still in its infancy, and the "Vita Nuova" is the earliest example of artistic prose in the Italian language. It has notable merits—the sovereign virtue of lucidity, where there is not an intention to be vague or obscure—a pure and graceful vocabulary, and a skill in the construction of sentences that might be expected from one who devoted much thought to

<sup>1</sup> P. 78 (Bohn's Library); for Salterello see above, p. 23.

the technique of composition and infinite care to the elaboration of his ideas. At the same time the "*Vita Nuova*" bears unmistakable signs that it was written by a poet. The pomp and ceremony that distinguish certain passages—especially the opening sections—appear exaggerated, almost ludicrous in relation to the simple circumstances that form the ground, and are calculated to repel, rather than attract, the reader.

In his essay "On the Prose Style of Poets,"<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt remarks: "Poets think they are bound by their indentures to the Muses to 'elevate and surprise' in every line. They make or pretend an extraordinary interest where there is none. It should seem as if they considered prose as a sort of waiting-maid to poetry that could only be expected to wear the mistress's cast-off finery." And, referring to Coleridge, he adds: "He has an incessant craving, as it were, to exalt every idea into a metaphor, to expand every sentiment into a mystery, voluminous and vast, confused and cloudy." We may compare with this judgment the great part that Love plays in the narrative, and Dante's apology for the same in § xxv. There he is evidently commenting on the preceding sonnet, but Love appears as an actor not only in that and other lyrics, but in various passages of the ancillary prose. This is the most conspicuous instance of the influence of mythology, with which is closely associated the psychology, or rather ontology, of the work. What does Dante intend by that strange, unreal, uncouth system of "spirits"? Why does he

<sup>1</sup> Bohn's Library ed. p. 15.

choose to clog his narrative with reports of the sayings and doings of these animated puppets?

## 10. PSYCHOLOGY

At the outset it may be remarked that this mode of representing things is a convention inherited from, and shared with, the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*, which had its birth in the philosophic atmosphere of Bologna. It is in no sense peculiar to Dante. Lapo Gianni, Dino Frescobaldi, Cino Sinibaldi, Guido Cavalcanti, all adopted this method of denoting mental and spiritual processes, and so it is part of the "second-hand finery" worn by the prose of the "Vita Nuova" as waiting-maid to the poetry. At best, it is a doubtful ornament. Bartoli calls it "an indubitable intrusion of philosophy into the field of art."<sup>1</sup> But we must, at any rate, seek to understand what is meant by the device. Dante employs the phrase not only in the early, but in later passages of the book; hence it is worth while to take some trouble about it, and it is only by patient study and comparison of its different applications that we can comprehend its significance. We may be tempted to say that the spirit of life, the spirits of vision, the natural spirits are, for practical purposes, merely periphrastic personifications, and that all that is necessary is to substitute for them Life, Eyes, Nature, etc., spelling each word with a capital initial letter. To a certain extent this may suffice, as in § xxxviii we find Dante addressing his eyes with-

<sup>1</sup> iv, 13.

out any such circumlocution. It is certain, however, that by the "spirits of vision" he means more than the fleshly eyes. This comes out quite clearly in § XIV, where he speaks of the eyes as their instruments. (Incidentally it may be noticed that Dante makes fine use of the idea in this context, for he represents Love as occupying the vacant place of the spirits of vision, in order to behold his lady.) Each of these spirits, it will be observed, has its appointed sphere. Dante does not mention that of the spirits of vision in the "Vita Nuova," but in the "Convivio"<sup>1</sup> he tells us that it communicates between the pupil of the eye and that part of the brain in which the faculty of perception (*la virtute sensibile*) resides, as in its fontal source. In modern parlance the nearest approach to "spirit" in this immediate connection is perhaps "principle," but it must not be forgotten that once or twice Dante plainly intimates that by *spirito* or *spiritello* he intends a thought,<sup>2</sup> and in many cases the word will doubtless bear the construction of a form of consciousness. In others the phrase "*element* of consciousness" appears to express the meaning. All the manifold activities of man, spiritual, intellectual, and corporeal, are figured as members of a household or state, as ministers in a complex economy in which Mind is the ruling factor. Some help to the understanding of the subject can be obtained from that chapter in the "Convivio"<sup>3</sup> wherein Dante discusses the threefold nature of the soul, which, he tells us in the "Paradiso,"<sup>4</sup> is diffused through the various

<sup>1</sup> iii, 9.<sup>2</sup> "Conv." ii, 7, 16.<sup>3</sup> iii, 2.<sup>4</sup> ii, 133-5.

members of the body, each of which is adapted to a particular power or faculty.

Did Dante believe in the objectivity of the spirits, or were they mere *flatus vocis*? We might draw the latter conclusion from his chapter on the personification of love, but it is not certain we should be right. Dante's philosophy may, in this respect, have resembled Bacon's. "The idea," says Ellis, "on which Bacon's theory of longevity is founded, namely, that the principle of life resides in a subtle fluid or spirit, which permeates the tangible parts of the organization of plants and animals, seems to be coeval with the first origin of speculative physiology. Bacon was one of those by whom this idea was extended from organized to inorganic bodies; in all substances, according to him, resides a portion of spirit, which manifests itself only in its operations, being altogether intangible and without weight. This doctrine appeared to him to be of most certain truth, but he has nowhere stated the grounds of his conviction, nor even indicated the kind of evidence by which the existence of the spiritus is to be established. In living bodies he conceived that two kinds of spirits exist: a crude or mortuary spirit, such as is present in other substances; and the animal or vital spirit, to which the phenomena of life are to be referred. To keep this vital spirit, the wine of life, from oozing away, ought to be the aim of the physician who attempts to increase the number of our few and evil days."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Preface to "Hist. Vitae et Mortis," E. and S., vol. ii, p. 94.

There is no precise correspondence between the two modes of thought, the mortuary spirit having no place in Dante's system, except as regards the influence of the Blessed Intelligences on the course of nature.<sup>1</sup> The co-existence of different spirits, however, is a point common to both philosophers, and, in Dante's case, this applies to the soul as well as to the body. We learn from the "Convivio"<sup>2</sup> that, while a spirit represents a single thought, a recurring thought which has acquired the character of an accepted and abiding principle may be fitly indicated as the soul; and thus the latter may be viewed as a congeries of prevailing spirits or ruling principles. Dante's spirit of life approximates to Bacon's animal or vital spirit. In the "Vita Nuova" the seat of this spirit is the heart—naturally, for if the heart ceases to beat the "vegetative" life, the lowest form of being, ceases.

Like the senses, the primary instincts are elevated into spirits. By the natural spirit that dwells in the mouth is meant the appetite, as will be seen on turning to § IV, where the phrase is re-introduced.

The heart is not only the seat of the spirit of life, but the symbol of appetite in the more general sense of desire, and here, more particularly, of sexual desire. Dante distinctly states that this is the case in his comments on Sonnet XXII, and the definition harmonizes with his use of the metaphor. In a dream he beholds his lady naked in the arms of Love, who feeds her with Dante's heart. This is afterwards deposited by Love with a lady to whom Dante addresses many

<sup>1</sup> "Par." ii.

<sup>2</sup> "Conv." ii, 7, 8.



poems, *as if* he loved her; and subsequently the god, meeting Dante on the highway, informs him that, as the lady has quitted Florence never to return, he has repossessed himself of the heart, and is conveying it to another lady, who is to serve in the same capacity. If we could place absolute dependence on these hieroglyphics, we should read between the lines of his formal version a confession of real passion for the lady of defence. As a rule, when the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*, including Dante himself, talk of defence with regard to love matters, they mean defence not against discovery, but against that state of complete prostration which they term death, and of which we have a startling description in the "Vita Nuova." This is not to deny that Dante was all the while more in love with Beatrice than the other lady, but the force of his attachment, and a sense of her great worth, rendered him timid. He staved off the day of final disillusionment as long as possible; and meanwhile the lady of defence served as a safety-valve. Dante, in a casuistical sonnet, decides that it is possible to love two women at the same time—one for her beauty, and the other for her virtue;<sup>1</sup> one as a source of pleasure, and the other as a motive of high achievement.

Bartoli maintains that, if Beatrice was a person, not an abstract ideal, Dante's conduct was disreputable in shamming an attachment for another woman, and then proclaiming his hypocrisy to the world. Like Scartazzini, he takes it for granted that Dante was too good a man to be capable of such a want of considera-

<sup>1</sup> xxx.

tion to his fair friends, whereas nothing in the poet's career stands out with more glaring distinctness than the unfortunate results that attended his philandering. In the "Vita Nuova" his suit to the second lady of defence leads to scandal, and Beatrice herself is compelled, by regard for her reputation, to ignore him in public, and ridicule his hysterical transports in society. On this point Dante showed himself incorrigible; for years afterwards he records against himself in the "Purgatorio":<sup>1</sup>

"A maid is born and wears not yet the veil,"  
 Began he, "who to thee shall pleasant make  
 My city, howsoever man may blame it.  
 Thou shalt go on thy way with this prevision;  
 If by my murmuring thou hast been deceived,  
 True things hereafter will declare it to thee."

There is no grammatical reason why we should not translate "blame her" instead of "blame it" (*i.e.* the city); and, in any case, the mention of the *benda*, or married woman's head-dress, points to the circumstance she was no longer unwedded at the time of their friendship. In so far, then, as Bartoli bases his argument for the non-existence of Beatrice in the flesh on the axiom of Dante's respectability and sensitive punctilio, it is far from convincing.

Now what is the truth about the abstract nature of Dante's love, for there is something in it? In the first place, stress has been laid on the expression "the glorious lady *of my mind*," which is found at the very commencement of the "Vita Nuova." This has been

<sup>1</sup> xxiv, 43-5.

supposed to imply that Beatrice was an imaginary being, who existed *only* in Dante's mind. The real meaning, unless we are much deceived, is quite different. Dante here uses the term *donna*, not in its ordinary acceptation of "woman," but in the original sense of *domina*. Beatrice was literally the mistress of his mind. She was his absorbing thought, and destroyed his liberty of action. That this is what is signified by *donna* is shown by a later passage in the same chapter in which he dwells on the *signoria* of love, and even more decisively by the alternative version of the same incident in Canzone XIII, more particularly the line *E sarà donna sopra tutti noi* ("and she will be mistress over us all"), spoken by the faculty of vision.

The fact is that the disciples of Guinicelli, while they were lovers, were also philosophers. They reflected deeply on the phenomenon of love, and learned to distinguish between the material cause or occasion of love and the mental image, which was the effect. The former, the real woman, was the *cosa*; the latter the *imagine*, the *figura*, or, more rarely, the *spirito*. This last term is employed in Sonnet X, which describes the process of falling in love, of which a longer and more explicit account is given in the eighteenth canto of the "Purgatorio":<sup>1</sup>

"Direct," he said, "towards me the keen eyes  
Of intellect, and clear to thee will be  
The error of the blind who would be leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> ll. 16-39.

The soul, which is created apt to love,  
Is mobile unto everything that pleases,  
Soon as by pleasure she is waked to action.  
Your apprehension from some real thing  
An image draws, and in yourselves displays it,  
So that it makes the soul turn unto it.  
And if, when turned, towards it she incline,  
Love is that inclination; it is nature,  
Which by pleasure is bound in you anew.  
Then even as the fire doth upward move  
By its own form, which to ascend is born,  
Where longest in its matter it endures,  
So comes the captive soul into desire,  
Which is a motion spiritual, and ne'er rests,  
Until it doth enjoy the thing beloved."

This completely disposes of the fallacy that Dante's love for Beatrice was from the first platonic, intellectual, unmixed with desire. He clearly understood that love, by its very nature, involves desire, that its goal is possession. Beatrice's greeting was all that he obtained from her, but the vehemence of his emotions precludes the belief that this was indeed "the end of all his desires," though the denial of this recognition must have pained him as closing the door on his lover's hopes. It was a case of unrequited affection, and Dante accepted the part of a distant admirer only when the offer of his heart had been sharply disdained.

The passage in the "Purgatorio" concludes:

Now may apparent be to thee how hidden  
The truth is from those people, who aver  
All love is in itself a laudable thing;  
Because its matter may perchance appear  
Aye to be good; yet not each impression  
Is good, albeit good may be the wax.

These words seem to have some bearing on the Protean character of Love, who, as depicted to us in the "Vita Nuova," is neither an infallible nor, at all times, a very respectable personage. He associates himself with Dante's miserable device of duping certain ladies, and acts as his go-between. If we confine ourselves to the bare statements of the "Vita Nuova," all that happened was that Dante allowed it to be supposed that he loved a lady other than Beatrice, and addressed insincere poems to her, Love presumably being the bearer of these valentines. At best this was not a very exalted function, but a candid perusal of Sonnet V will perhaps induce the belief that the business of Love on that occasion was, as we have already suggested, of another kind, and more in accordance with his traditional office.

Really Love appears in the "Vita Nuova" under different aspects—once as an unsuccessful pander posing as a pilgrim in mean attire,<sup>1</sup> and again as a youth arrayed in spotless white, that is, as an angel, in which capacity he uses the Latin tongue "very obscurely."<sup>2</sup> Love does not interpret to Dante, nor Dante to us, the purport of the dark saying, but some clue to the meaning may be obtained from the "Convivio,"<sup>3</sup> in which geometry is said to be very white, because it is not spotted by error. White is also the emblem of moral purity, and there is no reason to doubt that Beatrice was most chaste. In

<sup>1</sup> § ix.

<sup>2</sup> § xii.

<sup>3</sup> ii, 14, where it is also stated that the circle is a most perfect figure.

Sonnet XIV Love calls her by his own name—"so much she resembles me"—and in § XXIII her departing spirit is compared to a very white cloudlet. Love therefore takes his colour from the object and nature of the passion, but Dante addresses him as "Lord of Nobility" in the "Vita Nuova," and apostrophizes him in such ardent terms in Canzone IX that one cannot doubt the poet conceived of him as a lofty and beneficent daemon, though unquestionably a hard taskmaster.

## II. MYSTICISM

We have spoken of the oracle of Love. This is part of the mysticism which is so marked a feature of the "Vita Nuova," and which shows itself in other forms, besides the purely religious. For instance, Dante never once mentions Florence—it is "the city where my lady was set by the most high Lord," or "the city aforesaid"; and, as we have seen, Guido Cavalcanti is always "the first of my friends." Similarly, the head is the high chamber, "to which all the spirits carry their perceptions," and the mouth is "that part where our nutriment is ministered." The object is to impart solemnity to the narrative, to lift it above the pollution of common, everyday life into the rarer and purer atmosphere of philosophic abstraction. In his strivings after grandeur and impressiveness Dante adopts the most recondite means of revealing (or concealing) the dates of occurrences. Thus he states that, at Beatrice's first appearance, she had been in the world

long enough for the Stellar Heaven to have moved eastwards one twelfth of a degree. This mode of computation was derived from the Arabian astronomer, Alfraganus, who lived in the early part of the ninth century, and to whose works Dante had access through the medium of translations. Alfraganus taught that the Heaven of the Fixed Stars moved from west to east at the rate of one degree in a hundred years. Beatrice was therefore eight years and four months old at the time in question.

Still more intricate is the manner in which Dante indicates the period of her death. Three usages—the Arabian, the Syrian, and the Italian—are brought into play; and on the basis of these discordant methods of calculation it is shown that Beatrice died in the first hour of the ninth day of the ninth month of the year in which the perfect number—ten—had been nine times completed in the thirteenth century, *i.e.* on 9th June, 1290. As Dante was then twenty-five, and Beatrice some months younger, she would have been twenty-four when she died.

Now it must not be supposed that these laboured statements are gratuitous, or designed only to enhance the obscurity of the narrative. They are the fruits of a mysticism to which it is a law that all the important events of Dante's "new life" shall be associated with the number nine, its root, three, or a number of which three is a divisor. One and ten are also significant,<sup>1</sup> though Dante, in this work, lays less stress upon them. In § xxx he points out that Beatrice was a Christian

<sup>1</sup> See "De Mon." i, 8; "De Vulg. Eloq." i, 16.



of the thirteenth century, probably because thirteen is made up of ten, the perfect number, and three. The Stellar Heaven has moved the twelfth of a degree since the birth of Beatrice. Twelve is four multiplied by three.

It is, however, with nine, the square of three, that Dante is chiefly concerned, and in § XXIX he calls our attention to its repeated occurrence in his narrative. This is certainly a fact. Beatrice and himself are both in their *ninth* year at her first appearance. They are in their *eighteenth* when Dante's love for her is deepened or renewed. His earliest vision happens in the fourth hour of the night, but he overcomes the difficulty by designating it the first of the last nine hours. In the *serventese*, wherein he celebrated the sixty fairest ladies of Florence, the name of Beatrice can only be introduced as the *ninth* in order. The vision of Love in § XII takes place in the *ninth* hour of the day; it is on the *ninth* day of his malady that he bethinks him Beatrice must die, and it is at the hour of noon—the canonical *ninth* hour—that Beatrice appears to him after her decease.

How is it to be explained? Dante professes no certainty, but he puts forward two conjectures, which are not quite compatible. "The reason," he says, "why this number was so friendly to her might be this: Since according to Ptolemy and the Christian truth the heavens that move are nine in number, and according to common astrologic opinion the said heavens produce effects here below, according to their habitude, in conjunction, this number was a friend of hers to

give us to understand that all nine mobile heavens were in most perfect accord in her generation. This is one reason. But thinking more subtly, and according to infallible truth, this number was herself; by similitude I mean, and I intend it thus. The number three is the root of nine, since without other number, multiplied by itself, it makes nine, as we see manifestly that three times three makes nine. Therefore if three by itself is the maker of nine, and the maker of miracles by himself is three, namely, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who are three and one, this lady was accompanied by the number nine to give us to understand that she was a nine, that is a miracle, whose root is solely the wondrous Trinity. Perchance by more subtle person would be seen therein a more subtle reason, but this it is that I see, and that most pleases me."

Beatrice is called a "miracle" in Canzone I, Sonnets XI and XV, and again in the "Paradiso" (xviii, 63). Dante probably used the term synonymously with "angel." In § 11 he applies the latter expression to Beatrice, and in § xxvi the words seem convertible. The portrayal of a beloved lady as an angel is, in fact, one of the notes of the *dolce stil nuovo*. The "appearances" of Beatrice are analogous to the appearance of the Angel of the Lord to Zacharias, as recorded by St. Luke (i, 11), and the exclamation of the spirit of life in § 11 is clearly modelled on Luke iii, 16. The insertion in the Italian text of Latin sentences attributed to the various spirits and Love is obviously due to the fact that Latin is the language of the Vulgate, which Dante quotes in

§§ VII and XXIV, the latter quotation being taken from Luke iii, 4.

We have compared Beatrice's "appearances" to those of the Angel of the Lord, but the three exclamations suggest that Dante was really thinking of our Lord's epiphany, in the same way as the premonition of her death recalls the signs and wonders that followed the Crucifixion. In Sonnet II he appropriates, and, we may say, desecrates, a passage in Jeremiah by transferring to his own pangs language generally regarded as prophetic of our Lord's sorrow. Dante felt no incongruity, because love was a sacrament.

By the "appearances" of Beatrice Dante indicates the crises in which he became vividly and more or less permanently conscious of her existence and worth, and his soul became knit to her in the bonds of love and admiration. The process is accomplished by the image of the lady passing from her eyes to his own, and fixing itself in his mind, which forthwith cherishes and adorns it.

Closely connected with this phenomenon is the succession of dreams or visions, of which Dante remarks in the "Convivio" that "through my genius I already saw many things, so to speak, dreaming, as may be seen in the 'Vita Nuova.'" It may be taken for granted that the visions are not dreams in the common or literal sense. They are poetical fantasies expressed in the terms of a vision, than which it is difficult to find a word more suited to describe a condition of complete detachment from ordinary interests.

It may be noted that in § ix the term "imagination" is substituted for "dream," and the circumstance that Love "appeared" to him, whilst he was journeying, precludes the notion that the poet was asleep. We may look for the germ of his first vision in his reading. Dante was an admirer of Sordello, who makes a great figure in the "Purgatorio," and it is probable that at some time he had perused the *planh* on Blacatz, whose heart was to be eaten by certain pusillanimous monarchs, when they would have "heart enow." True, in that case, it is courage, not love or desire, that is to be assimilated, but the general idea—that of inoculation by feeding—is in both instances the same. The phrase *mange del cor* had, by dint of iteration, been stamped on Dante's memory, whence, with a vague reminiscence of its context, or perhaps by a conscious metamorphosis, he made it the basis of an allegory. "I believe," says Ruskin,<sup>1</sup> "that the noblest forms of imaginative power are in some sort ungovernable, and have in them something of the character of dreams; so that the vision, of whatever kind, comes uncalled, and will not submit itself to the seer, but conquers him and forces him to speak as a prophet, having no power over his words or thoughts. Only if the whole man be trained perfectly, and his mind calm, consistent, and powerful, the vision which comes to him is seen as in a perfect mirror, serenely and in consistence with the rational powers; but if the mind be imperfect and ill-trained, the vision is seen as in a broken mirror, with strange distortions and discrepancies, all

<sup>1</sup> "Stones of Venice," ii, 195-6 (1881 ed.).

the passions of the heart breathing upon it in cross ripples till hardly a trace of it remains unbroken. So that, strictly speaking, the imagination is never governed; it is always the ruling and Divine power; and the rest of the man is to it only as an instrument which it sounds, or a tablet on which it writes; clearly and sublimely, if the wax be smooth and the strings true, grotesquely and wildly, if they are stained and broken. And thus the 'Iliad,' the 'Inferno,' the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' the 'Faërie Queen,' are all of them true dreams; only the sleep of the men to whom they came was the deep, living sleep which God sends, with a sacredness in it as of death, the revealer of secrets. . . .

"I think that the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante."

## CHAPTER II

### THE CANZONIERE

#### I. CONTENTS

WE have seen that the "Vita Nuova" consists of a medley of prose and verse, and there is a general agreement that the commentary is of later origin than the poems which it elucidates. The latter are, in fact, only specimens of Dante's lyrical muse relating directly or indirectly to his love for Beatrice. Besides those pieces of which she is the subject it is evident from his own statements that he wrote others, some of which were addressed to the first lady of defence, and some to the gentle lady who consoled him. It is a reasonable inference also that he made love to the second lady of defence partly, if not entirely, by sending her songs and sonnets. Then there were the young gentlewoman of Lucca, the perhaps legendary mountain-maid, and the bold Lisetta, who may be suspected of sharing his indefinite poetical attentions. Lastly, in the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" he speaks of himself as *par excellence* a preacher of righteousness, and it depends upon the date of the treatise whether he points to the

"Commedia" or to shorter poems preceding that composition which were distinctively ethical.

The *Canzoniere* represents the whole of Dante's surviving lyrical poetry, which he has not himself "edited." It seems needless to annotate the poems of the "Vita Nuova" individually, since the poet has performed this task with a minuteness and perspicuity that leaves nothing to be desired. It is partially for that reason that those poems seem so much *easier* than many others as to which we have not the advantage of Dante's own piloting. He himself recognizes the difficulty of the first canzone in the "Convivio," the literal sense of which is by no means obvious, while its application to philosophy would have occurred to no one but for his ingenious gloss. Very few now believe that this and other poems of the class were originally intended to bear that construction. They were love-poems, neither more nor less, having for their subject the virtuous and beautiful lady or ladies, who for a while took Beatrice's place in Dante's heart, and a study of the second canzone will show that the sentiments expressed in it are exactly similar to those the poet was accustomed to avow with reference to Beatrice herself. The result is that it is often, and indeed usually, impossible to allocate poems outside the "Vita Nuova" and the "Convivio" to Beatrice or one of her rivals on the ground of internal evidence. It has been assumed that Dante invariably wrote of Beatrice in the reverent manner that characterizes the "Vita Nuova," but this cannot be proved, and it may be that in the heat of passion he resented



her coolness and her cruelty in effusions of a different sort from the select compositions he deemed worthy of embalmment. But there is reason for surmise that it was rather the second love that provoked him to intemperate utterance.

It is well to approach the *Canzoniere* with an open mind, unbiassed by preconceived ideas of Dante as a person of inflexible virtue, sternly observant of the sins of others, and himself capable of committing none but the most venial and almost laughable errors. In this medley of poems we must be prepared to see him discover certain aspects of himself with a candour not to be found elsewhere. In the "Vita Nuova" his purpose is to deify Beatrice, in the "Convivio" to exalt philosophy, in the "Commedia" to justify the ways of God to men. In all three works he sometimes raises the veil that conceals an intensely passionate nature, but none the less he is bound by the conditions of his undertakings, and by a self-imposed ordinance, to exercise considerable reserve. In the *Canzoniere* Dante has more liberty, and dons his true colours. The poems show us the real man as he was before the chastening hand of Providence reclaimed him from the faults and follies of imagination, if not of experience. They bring out in startling relief a number of traits but faintly adumbrated in those writings in which, at the price of sincerity, he seeks to harmonize his life; and so it is not too much to say that the *Canzoniere* is a hammer of illusions.

## 2. POEMS RELATED TO THE "VITA NUOVA"

Among the crowd of compositions are some immediately related to the "Vita Nuova," the most conspicuous being undoubtedly Canzone XIII, which touches it at three points. The poem is a palinode to one that might have followed § II or § III; and, to all appearance, it was indited on the occasion recorded in § XIV, when Dante, convinced of the hopelessness of his passion, recurred in thought to the date of its inception, when joy and gladness were the concomitants of love, though even there were voices prophesying ill.

In § XIV of the "Vita Nuova" Dante's state, when overcome by despair, is represented as one of complete paralysis, from which it is only a step to death. Here he talks of breathing his last sigh; his heart is as good as dead, and to the middle of that dead heart his soul has withdrawn as to its last refuge, from which it is on the eve of departing. There is, therefore, a tolerably close correspondence between the account contained in § XIV of the "Vita Nuova" and that here given.

The chief interest of the poem, however, lies in the reminiscences of the earliest phases of Dante's attachment to Beatrice. It is not quite clear whether the expression "when Love opened them [the beauteous eyes]" is an allusion to the awakening of Beatrice in § III, though it probably is. The canzone, in general, looks back to the circumstances narrated in § II, of

which it supplies a rather different version. There it is the "animal spirit" that reassures the Spirits of Vision; here it is the eyes of the beauteous lady that communicate with Dante's, promising to them delight, and to the heart peace.

In the fifth stanza, which resumes the topic, we are struck with the almost complete identity of the phrase, "the book of the mind," with "the book of my memory" in the proem of the "Vita Nuova." "My small person" means that Dante was a boy at the time. He was, as we know, eight years of age, whilst Beatrice was rather younger. This proves that the expression "came into the world" refers not to the birth of the lady, but to that of her image, which is described in the preceding stanza as "sitting in his mind." This image was born when "the great beauty," which was to cause him so much grief, became manifest to him.<sup>1</sup>

The "greatest spirit that trembled so violently" is, of course, the Spirit of Life. In the "Vita Nuova" this spirit utters the first cry, but here he shudders at a voice that penetrates his "most secret chamber." The term "virtue," as employed in this and the succeeding stanza, is equivalent to "spirit," as used in the third stanza, and so frequently in the "Vita Nuova." "That virtue which has most nobility" is the faculty of vision. In the "Convivio"<sup>2</sup> it is called *la virtù visiva*, and the pleasure on which it looks is the lady's fair face—more especially her eyes and her smile.<sup>3</sup> The Spirits of Vision are not stated in the

<sup>1</sup> l. 71.

<sup>2</sup> iii, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Canz. ii, 55-9.

"Vita Nuova" to have entertained forebodings—it is the Natural Spirit that is perturbed. The former, however, carry messages to the mind. Here the faculty of vision addresses her companions, telling them that there would arrive in the room of one whom she saw the "beauteous form" that has already excited her fears. "One whom I saw" alludes to the lady's bodily presence; the "beauteous form" corresponds with the mental image mentioned in the fourth stanza, the purport of which justifies the apprehensions expressed at the outset of the affair. The image, as it is presented there, had undergone a notable change since the time when it was of noble virtue always.<sup>1</sup> This was inevitable, as the lady herself had changed. For "the noble and laudable demeanour" that had characterized her girlhood had been substituted *gabbo*. The mocking words of the image are an echo of the ridicule of the "beauteous *thing*" that had shown no pity.<sup>2</sup>

Let us now turn to Sonnet XXXV, which treats of the same theme—Beatrice's scorn of Dante, his *gabbato affanno*. This is evidently one of a family of sonnets, two of which have been included in the "Vita Nuova." Compared with them it reveals marks of inferiority, which rendered it inadmissible in that delicate, undefiled compilation. In the "Vita Nuova" Dante either praises Beatrice, or, as in Sonnets VII and VIII, mildly reproaches her. He does not accuse her of heartlessness, as in Canzone XII, nor of treachery, as in that poem and here. Nor again, in the "Vita

<sup>1</sup> "Vita Nuova," § II.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 91-2.

Nuova," does he testify against himself, as he does in this place, that "severed from reason and virtue," he "follows desire as his guide." In the second quatrain his outer and inner vision are described as dazzled, the one by what is shown of his lady's charms, the latter by what is suggested. Comment is hardly needed, but we may recall the picture in § III of the "Vita Nuova": Beatrice nude in the arms of Love, save that she is *lightly* wrapped in a crimson robe; and the conclusion of Canzone XX, with its allusion to the *dolce pomo*.

Comparison of this sonnet with § XIV of the "Vita Nuova" raises a suspicion that the story of the wedding party is partly, if not wholly, allegorical. The "friendly person" may be none other than Desire. In the last line *pietà*, as often in Italian poetry, signifies "sorrow," and the expression "sorrow betrayed by compassion" refers to the good intentions of Dante's friend in conducting him into the presence of his lady, which worked woe.

Sonnet XXXIII shows Dante highly indignant at the untoward result of his experiment, which has made him the butt of universal laughter. He curses the day he first saw the light of his lady's eyes; he curses his pains in composing finished and beautiful poems, that the world may ever praise her; he curses his own stubborn mind in harbouring what is killing him—her beautiful and wicked image. Witte and others have doubted the authenticity of this sonnet, which one codex assigns to Cino of Pistoia. Two others, the "Laurentian" and "Riccardian," give it to

Dante, and Fraticelli is surely right in claiming it for him. It appears to have been indited on the same occasion as Canzone XIII and Sonnet XXXV. With the latter it shares the phrase "traitor eyes," while the state of affairs recorded in the second and third stanzas of the former practically coincides with the description of the lady alighting on the crest of the poet's heart to draw forth his soul.

To the same cycle belongs, perhaps, Sonnet XXXIX, in which the ardour of the lover is contrasted with the coldness of the lady. Her desire reposes in a frozen lake, his in love's fire. Even more striking is the comparison—a reminiscence of Ovid's story of Clytie ("Met." IV, 256, etc.)—in which he expresses his sense of the utter futility of his quest: "Not even she who turns to behold the sun, and changing keeps unchanging love, had such bitter fortune as I." The poem acknowledges not only the futility, but the fatuity of his passion. He is so entranced with his torment that no other pleasure ventures to present itself. The same contradiction appears in Ballad III, where the metaphor of a lake is again used. In that little poem Dante declares that love is killing him, and that death is hard, but he has more fear of feeling love less. From the beautiful eyes shines a light into the midst of his mind, and his soul is content. But straightway swoops a shaft, and ere it be quenched it has drained from his heart a lake.

In Sonnet XXVII, when a gentle light is shed from his lady's eyes, things are seen man cannot portray—they are so high and strange. But the vision

inspires fear, and Dante says to himself he will never return to it. Thereafter he repents, and does return, encouraging his timorous eyes to confront their victor. 'Tis vain. On arrival his eyes are closed, and the desire that has brought them thither is extinct. "Therefore," he concludes, "may Love provide for my state!"

These compositions cannot be proved to refer to Beatrice, but kinship is established between them and Sonnet XXXV, of which she is almost certainly the subject, by the similarities of the ideas, as well as verbal resemblances. (Compare l. 9 of Sonnet XXVII with ll. 3 and 4 of Sonnet XXXV, and the first two lines of Sonnet XXXV with l. 7 of Sonnet XXXIX.)

In § v of the "Vita Nuova" Dante mentions that in order to strengthen the impression that the lady whom he used as a screen was the real object of his devotion, he wrote for her certain little things in rhyme, which it was not his intention to copy in that particular book, which treated of the most gentle Beatrice. Are there any poems in the *Canzoniere* that can be reasonably connected with this equivoque? It is doubtful. At first sight Sonnet XLVIII seems to answer the requirements of the case. In the "Vita Nuova" <sup>1</sup> Dante states that the lady quitted the city and went to a very *distant* country. Here he speaks of his lady's "beauteous aspect" as having been taken from him, and of himself as sighing and weeping, so *distant* from her pretty face. He is afflicted because he does not see her as he was wont. These sentiments

<sup>1</sup> § VII.



are obviously appropriate to a situation created by the removal of a girl the poet professes to adore. Now let the reader turn to the fifth stanza of Canzone XX, which was confessedly written after Dante's exile, and he will find almost identical phrases. The two poems are evidently *en rapport*, and Bartoli's scepticism regarding the genuineness of the sonnet is unnecessary. He points out that it is characteristic of Cino to begin with a conditional clause, and he parallels the conclusion with Cino's line:

Tutto ch' altrui aggrada a me disgrada.

These reasons do not appear cogent. The attribution of the sonnet to Cino is purely conjectural, and unsupported by manuscript authority. Dante and Cino belonged to the same school of poetry, and the idea expressed at the conclusion may rank as one of its commonplaces. The same remark will apply to the method of commencing.

Some suppose that Canzone XVI was written for the lady of defence, and on the very occasion referred to in § ix of the "Vita Nuova." Dante, it will be recollected, had occasion to set out from Florence and travel in the direction of the place in which she was residing, though his destination was not so remote. He suffers great anguish of mind, because he is going farther and farther away from the scene of his bliss. In the canzone he represents his heart as assailed on both sides—on one side by the memory of the past, and on the other by longing for the lovely country he has left. He adds that he cannot long maintain the

*defence*, unless it (the defence) comes from the lady to whom he writes. It has been argued that the *gentil Madonna* cannot be Beatrice on account of the tone of the poem, which borders on sensuality, "hardly veiled by the customary phraseology of poetical convention."<sup>1</sup>

It is certainly true that there are sundry expressions in the poem that lend themselves to *double entendre*. For instance, in the third stanza he tells his "sweet hope" that if she is minded to put off the fulfilment of his wish, she must know that he can wait no longer, being at the end of his resources. Dante, however, may allude to the dismay which he experienced on her departure. The poet desires the lady's return, and the "delay" may be explained with reference to that. In the course of the journey Love appears with the tidings *so che il suo rivenire non sarà*;<sup>2</sup> until that moment, therefore, Dante had expected to see her again. We have spoken of *double entendre*. In § VII of the "Vita Nuova" it is plainly stated that "the immediate occasion" of Sonnet II was his lady; and a number of phrases in Canzone XVI suggest that he is really thinking of Beatrice, *e.g.*, "You are she whom I love the most." The undercurrent of sensuality is largely inferential. Allowing that it is present, the argument amounts to little, since we have seen that in Sonnet XXXV Dante confesses that he follows the guidance of Desire.

Frankly, we believe that the subject of the canzone is neither Beatrice nor the lady of defence, but some

<sup>1</sup> Carducci.

<sup>2</sup> "Vita Nuova," § IX.

fair one with whom he fell in love after his banishment from Florence. The sentiments to which he owns at the commencement are precisely those which befit an exile,<sup>1</sup> and that Dante loved at least one lady after Florence "had cast him forth from her sweet bosom," is proved by Canzoni XI and XX. We are of opinion that this poem belongs to the same series, which probably includes many others. On this point more will be said presently. What is the sense of the expression, "wherefore I hold myself *great*," in l. 48? The phrase may receive some illustration from Sonnet XXX. Two ladies descend on the apex of Dante's mind to discourse on love. One has courtesy and worth, and prudence and honesty; the other, beauty, seductive charm, and graceful manners. Beauty and Virtue propose a question to the understanding—how a heart can stand between two ladies with perfect love. Dante's answer is that Beauty can be loved for delight, and Virtue for *high achievement*. This we take to mean that a chivalrous love inspires a man to self-mastery and great performances, even as the troubadour sings:

For indeed I know  
Of no more subtle passion under heaven  
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,  
Not only to keep down the base in man,  
But teach high thought and amiable words,  
And courtliness and the desire of fame,  
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.<sup>2</sup>

These words would aptly describe Dante's feelings

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Purg." viii, 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Chaytor, "Troubadours of Dante," p. xxii.

towards Beatrice, but if the saying, "wherefore I hold myself great," is addressed to a lady to whom Dante became attached after his banishment, it would seem to mean that her friendship counteracted the sense of humiliation, of degradation, of which we have evidence in the "Convivio" and the "Commedia." In Canzone XI he tells us that he has no longer any desire to return to Florence on account of a greater attraction elsewhere. Hence the *difesa* for which he craves in Canzone XVI has been supplied.

We have discovered in the "Vita Nuova" indications that Dante's version of his relations with the ladies is not strictly literal, that he was not quite constant to Beatrice during her lifetime. In Sonnet XXX he maintains that a man can love two women at the same time, and with equal sincerity, but in a different way. Sonnet XXXVI suggests that Dante, in one of his moods, regarded his love for Beatrice as similar to that which he might feel for any other woman. In this poem he casts the blame on the invincible might of Eros, against which it is as vain to strive as it is for ignorant folk to set bells pealing in the hope of assuaging a tempest. The date of the composition is unknown. It is not impossible that it was written as a kind of apology for the lapse before-mentioned, and is the "Sermo Calliopeus" of Epistle IV. This sonnet is so utterly unlike anything to be found in the "Vita Nuova" that it seems worth while to cite Dean Plumptre's translation of it.

I have with Love in contact close been thrown  
From the ninth year the sun did mark for me,

And know how he now curb, now spur may be,  
 And how beneath him men may smile and groan.  
 Who strives with him, with skill and strength alone,  
 Acts as he does, who, when the storm plays free,  
 Rings out a peal, as though the vaporous sea  
 And thunderous strife that music may atone.  
 Wherefore within the range of that his bow  
 Free choice to act hath not his freedom true,  
 So that our counsels vain dart to and fro.  
 Well with new spur in flank he may us prick,  
 And each new pleasure he before us lays,  
 We needs must follow, of the old love sick.

In Canzone XI (ll. 38-40, 82-4), the bondage of love is the central idea. Dante lived to revise the opinion that there is no freewill in love, as one may see by consulting the eighteenth canto of the "Purgatorio" (ll. 61-72).

When the poet lost his first lady of defence he endeavoured to substitute another, and thrust his attentions on a maiden in such a way as to cause her annoyance and provoke undesirable gossip. It seems probable that Sonnet XLV was indited to console the victim. He tells us that a sensible lady ought not to allow herself to be troubled by the coarseness of the coarse, or the words of the wicked, but believe that her good fame cannot be denied, being conscious that truth did not occasion the rumour. She is like a rose among thorns, and pure gold within the fire, and so he counsels her to let fools talk as they will. Her reputation will gain more than if the miscreants adopted the opposite procedure.

In § xxii of the "Vita Nuova," Dante expatiates on Beatrice's sorrow at the death of her father, and

concludes with two sonnets referring to the subject. It would appear that he wrote other poems on the same topic, namely, Sonnets XLI and LI. The former bears an obvious resemblance to Sonnet XII, the former of the two included in the "Vita Nuova," the identical question being put to the mournful ladies—"Whence come ye?"—and information being requested, in like manner, concerning Beatrice.

The tercets are not felicitous, since Dante calls attention to his own love-lorn and desperate plight, and craves consolation from the kindly women. The transition is so abrupt that one is almost tempted to seek some other explanation of the ladies' grief than sympathy with the bereaved, but the similarity between this poem and Sonnet XII is so marked as to determine the occasion beyond just doubt. It seems not unlikely that Dante, after writing this sonnet, discarded it, and distributed its contents between Sonnets XII and XIII. The "Vita Nuova" shows two commencements of Sonnet XVIII; hence we may infer that the poet occasionally felt dissatisfied with his work, and that some of the compositions in the *Canzoniere* are *abbozzi*, or rough sketches.

Sonnet LI is also related to § xxii of the "Vita Nuova," and it is worthy of note that the language of the quatrains closely resembles that of Sonnet XIII, the difference being that the former is applied to Beatrice and the latter to Dante. In the "Vita Nuova," Dante's address to the ladies is assigned to Sonnet XII, and their reply to Sonnet XIII, while Sonnet LI is bipartite, the poet's speech being com-

prised in the quatrains and the ladies responding in the tercets. Such dialogues are very infrequent in Dante's sonnets, the only other example that occurs to us being in Sonnet L.

Canzone XVII, in which Dante apostrophizes Death and beseeches him to spare his lady, is manifestly related to § XXIII of the "Vita Nuova," in which the poet describes his delirium. The whole tone and spirit of the poem are in complete accord with the sentiments expressed in the narrative, but we may call special attention to the concluding lines of the first stanza:

To thee it needs must be I turn my face,  
Painted in fashion of a person dead.  
I come to thee, as to a person pitiful, etc.

In the "Vita Nuova" Dante tells Death that he must be gentle, and observes "Already I wear thy hue." Again, in the fourth stanza, Dante sees the heavens open and the angels of God descending to bear away the holy soul of her "in whose honour they sing up there." This passage not only accords with Canzone II, but is an echo of Canzone I. The ode is an extremely fine one, steeped in subdued passion and tender melancholy. It would therefore have been quite in place in the "Vita Nuova," but Dante preferred Canzone II, which deals with a later moment when the unreality of the vision had become apparent to him.

In marking the various stages of Dante's love it has been pointed out that from § XVIII of the "Vita Nuova," Beatrice reassumes her angelic character by



a process of *trasumanar*.<sup>1</sup> In § 11 he had called her *questa angiola*; and Sonnets XI, XV, and XVI, exhibit her no more as *gabbatrice*, mocking his sorrow, but as semi-divine and wholly benevolent. To this set, apparently, belongs Sonnet XXIX, which is so exceptionally beautiful that it is surprising room was not found for it in the "Vita Nuova." It is precious not only as a token of Dante's higher and better self, but as a pretty picture of old Florence. Rossetti thus translates:

Last All Saints' holy-day, even now gone by,  
I met a gathering of damozels;  
She that came first, as one doth who excels,  
Had Love with her, bearing her company;  
A flame burned forward through her steadfast eye,  
As when in living fire a spirit dwells;  
So, gazing with the boldness which prevails  
O'er doubt, I knew an angel visibly.  
As she passed on, she bowed her mild approof  
And salutation to all men of worth,  
Lifting the soul to solemn thoughts aloof.  
In heaven itself that lady had her birth,  
I think, and is with us for our behoof:  
Blessed are they who meet her on the earth.

### 3. FELLOWSHIP OF THE POETS

In § xxiv of the "Vita Nuova," Beatrice is named with Giovanna (or Primavera), a lady-love of Guido Cavalcanti. There, too, Beatrice has precedence, but Dante speaks of Giovanna in high terms, as if she were in every way worthy of the companionship. In

<sup>1</sup> "Par." i, 70.

Sonnet XXXII Dante associates with himself and Guido, another of the poetic brotherhood, Lapo Gianni, and expresses a desire that they three and the ladies to whom they are severally attached, might be transported by enchantment to a vessel, and sail whither they would, dwelling in perfect concord and discoursing ever of love. In l. 9 of the "Oxford Dante," we find "Monna Lagia," where some editions have "Monna Bice," as in Sonnet XIV. The former reading may have better manuscript authority, but, on general grounds, the latter appears preferable. It has been supposed that Lagia was a sweetheart of Lapo, but one of Cavalcanti's sonnets alludes to a Lagia in connection with himself and another Guido, possibly Guido Orlandi, and Bartoli holds that she was loved by both Guidi, certainly by Cavalcanti. From what has been stated, however, it seems pretty clear that "Monna Vanna" was intended as Cavalcanti's partner, and that Beatrice cannot have been the lady who was "thirtieth on the roll," for Dante refers to the *serventese*, in which he celebrated the sixty most beautiful women in Florence, and he tells us distinctly that he could only bring in Beatrice's name as the ninth. "The thirtieth on the roll" must therefore have been Lapo's lady, or there can be no question of pairs at all. "Monna Bice" is Dante's lady and Giovanna's mate in Sonnet XIV, and why not here also? To be sure, Lagia may have been the lady of defence, but this is less likely.

The term *ragionar*, though applicable to any kind of talk, suggests that the discourse was to run on the

philosophy or casuistry of love. Illustrations of this pastime abound in both the "Vita Nuova" and the *Canzoniere*. The question propounded and resolved in Sonnet XXX is a case in point: a similar matter is discussed in Sonnet XXXIV. In one of his poems, still extant, Cino confides to Dante that Love invites him to enter upon a fresh adventure, but he fears to comply, as he has proved his treachery and is smarting from a former wound. Sonnet XXXIV answers the inquiry, "What shall I do, Dante?" It takes the form of a reproof. Dante remarks that he had deemed himself altogether quit of Messer Cino's rhymes, and another course became his barque already far from the shore. However, he consents to lend his wearied finger to the topic in order to acquaint his correspondent that he has heard more than once that he allows himself to be caught with every hook, and one who is continually bound and loosed can be but lightly grazed by Love's arrows.

One might have looked for a more sympathetic consideration of poor Cino's dilemma, since Dante himself had experienced the shiftiness and falsehood of Love. In Sonnet XXXIII he declares that Love often perjures himself, and Sonnet XL seems especially to refer to the conduct of the god as related in §§ IX, X, and XII of the "Vita Nuova." He counsels Dante to pay court to a second lady of defence, and, as the consequence, the poet sustains a severe rebuff. He then advises him to approach Beatrice, and the result is—*gabbo*. In Sonnet XL Dante shows he has lost all confidence in his master, and admonishes his rhymes

that if a plausible stranger presents himself, not to listen to him as the lord who inspires ladies with tenderness. There is nothing in his utterances that is a "friend of truth." He then proceeds: "But if by his words ye be moved to approach your lady, dally not." These words, as it seems to us, anticipate the advice that Love tenders in § XII of the "Vita Nuova," and bore fruit in Ballad I.

Ultimately Dante degrades Love from his status as a god or angel, to that of "an accident in a substance." The philosophical exposure of the fraud in the "Vita Nuova" has its counterpart in Sonnet XXXVIII, where we are again assured that Love is not a thing in itself—a substance with a body and visible form. Rather, he says, it is a passionate desire, a pleasure in beauty bestowed by nature. The essence of Love was, as we have seen, the supreme problem of the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*, and doubtless it would have been the staple of discourse, had Dante's wish been realized and the six friends found themselves in congenial seclusion on the boundless sea.

The bards of that particular school composed a brotherhood, as sharing the same views and methods. In § III of the "Vita Nuova," Dante tells us that he sent his first sonnet to many of the most famous poets, receiving various replies. He does not tell us that one was from his namesake Dante of Majano, who was older and an adherent of Guittone—and that it was unkind.

At some period Dante experienced a dearth of intelligent and interested friends, and communicated his

sense of solitude to Cino of Pistoia in Sonnet XLVI. We do not know whether the poem was written before or after his banishment, but it seems not improbable that his scornful words were aimed at Florence. "Since," he says, "I find none to talk with me of the lord whom we serve, both you and I, I must needs satisfy the great desire I have of uttering good thoughts." And he goes on to state that the only reason for his long silence is the bad place he is in. It is so bad that "the good finds none that will give lodging to it." "There's not a woman here, to whose face Love will come, nor yet a man that will sigh for him; any one who did so would be called a fool." "Ah, Messer Cino," he concludes, "how times have changed, to our detriment and that of our songs, since the good here is so little harvested."

#### 4. MORAL POEMS

What the ladies of Florence were like in Dante's day is set forth with much plainness in the twenty-third canto of the "Purgatorio,"<sup>1</sup> where Forese Donati testifies:

So much more dear and pleasing is to God  
My little widow whom I so much loved,  
As in good works she is the more alone;  
For the Barbagia of Sardinia  
By far more modest in its women is  
Than the Barbagia I have left her in.  
O brother sweet, what wilt thou have me say?  
A future time is in my mind already,  
To which this hour will not be very old,

<sup>1</sup> ll. 91-105.

When from the pulpit shall not be interdicted  
To the unblushing womankind of Florence  
To go about displaying breasts and paps,  
What savages were e'er, what Saracens,  
Who stood in need to make them covered go,  
Of spiritual or other discipline?  
But if the shameless women were assured  
Of what swift Heaven prepares for them already,  
Wide open would they have their mouths to howl.

The *Canzoniere* contains nothing so scathing as this terrible denunciation, but it affords evidence of a low standard of morals among both men and women. Canzone X is a lecture to the Florentine ladies, the purpose of which is to chide—very gently—their wanton ways, and to warn them against the worthlessness of their admirers. This worthlessness is exposed only in one particular (*in alcun membro*)—namely, avarice, but Dante asserts that all vices meet in each of those he censures, and that is practically everybody. The Canzone opens with some instruction respecting the place of beauty in the economy of things. By an ancient decree of Love it was formed for virtue. Beauty was given to women, and virtue to men, whilst to Love was given the power of making two one. Women ought not therefore to love, but to cover what measure of beauty is vouchsafed them, for that is not virtue, which was its mark. He holds it a fine renunciation on the part of a woman to dismiss beauty. But the ladies of Florence transgress Love's decree. They have a vile desire to attract men by displaying their charms.

Dante turns to the men. They, he says, have ban-

ished virtue, and are no longer men, but beasts that resemble men. The covetous man is a slave to a hard master, and in danger of losing what he has amassed. The want of measure that marks the gathering of riches marks also the retention of them, and plunges many into servitude. Death and fortune, what are they doing that they do not unloose the purse-strings? Reason should correct, but, alas! reason is bound—over-ridden. Addressing the sons of greed, the poet exclaims: "False animals, cruel to yourselves and others! Ye see men wandering naked o'er hill and marsh, before whom vice has fled; and ye keep vile dirt clothed!"

The miser cannot give. He converts giving into selling by delay, by vain-glorious countenance or gloomy look, and he sells dear. The conclusion is that she is not to be believed who holds it good to be beautiful so as to be loved by such people. Under such conditions beauty is a misfortune, and love bestial appetite. Perish the woman who dissociates her beauty from natural goodness for that reason, and believes Love to be without the garden of Reason. (There are many passages in Dante's writings in which he tilts against avarice, but the reader should especially compare with this poem "Convivio," i, 9; "Paradiso," xi, 1-12.)

In the *tornata* Dante tells his song that there is a countrywoman of theirs, who is beautiful, wise, and courteous, and bids it repair to her, explain its errand, and then follow her directions. It is possible that Dante had observed a tendency in her to follow the



fashion and wished to prejudice her against the rest of mankind in his own interest as a lover, but more probably his notion is to exalt her as a noble exception and pattern.

The lady may have been the "Monna Vanna" of Sonnets XIV and XXXII, Bianca and Cortese being complimentary like Primavera ("Vita Nuova," § xxiv). Lines 151-3 embody the same idea as the cryptic *lo quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice, i quali non sapeano che si chiamare* of the "Vita Nuova"—that is, the names are uttered without a thought as to their meaning or fitness for the persons to whom they are applied. Primarily the term "white" may refer to Giovanna's complexion. In Canzone XI (l. 66) and Canzone XX (l. 51) Dante's ladies have *bionde trecchie*, and fair hair is usually accompanied by a fair skin; nor may we forget that one of Dante's most beautiful similes is that wherein the transition from the ruddy atmosphere of Mars to the white light of Jupiter is compared to a *bianca donna*:

When her face  
Is from the load of bashfulness unladen!<sup>1</sup>

In a secondary sense whiteness, as we have already seen, denotes purity. As for Giovanna, Dante must have known from his well-thumbed Latin dictionary, Uguccione's "Magnae Derivationes," that the name signified the Grace of God. Evidence of this appears in the twelfth canto of the "Paradiso" (ll. 80-1):

O thou his mother, verily Joanna,  
If this, interpreted, means as it is said.

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<sup>1</sup> "Par." xviii, 65.

Lastly, as regards Cortese, Dante attached to the term a different sense from that assigned to it by "the wretched vulgarians." In the "Convivio" (ii, 11) he states that courtesy and honesty (or honour) are identical, and in Sonnet XXX it is a moral rather than a social quality. Is it possible that we have here a clue to the personality of the Lady of Pity, Dante's second love? In the "Vita Nuova"<sup>1</sup> she is gentle, beautiful, young, and wise; in the "Convivio"<sup>2</sup> she is beautiful, wise, and courteous—the very epithets applied to Giovanna in Canzone X. It is true that he speaks of this lady as *molto donna* of Cavalcanti,<sup>3</sup> but she may have been *molto donna* of Dante also—one of his set. The *Canzoniere* includes a pretty rustic poem (Ballad IV), beginning:

Fresca rosa novella,  
Piacente Primavera.

Bartoli gives this to Cavalcanti, but Cavalcanti's loves, as far as his own poetry shows, were Pinella, Mandetta, and Lagia. If the reading "Monna Lagia" be retained in Sonnet XXXII, "Monna Vanna" may represent Dante's sweetheart. Most of the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo* had more than one, and we have found reason to suspect that Dante was not always faithful to Beatrice whilst she lived. He himself confesses that he was not true to her after her death, and then perhaps it was that Canzone X and Sonnet XXXII were written.

But we have not yet done with the Barbagia.

<sup>1</sup> § XXXIX.

<sup>2</sup> Canz. i, 46-7.

<sup>3</sup> "Vita Nuova," § XXIV.

Sonnet XLIV describes the adventure of a certain Lisetta, who traverses the Way of Beauty intent on storming the tower of Dante's heart. At the foot she hears a voice that bids her depart. Above sits a lady, who asks Love for the rod of authority, and at once he gives it to her. Seeing herself dismissed from Love's abode, Lisetta returns, the picture of shame. The "Ottimo Comento" speaks of Lisetta as one of Dante's loves, and Professor Barbi, in a brochure printed for private circulation, conjectures that she was the *donna pietosa* of the "Vita Nuova." If so, she may have been Giovanna as well. The name Giovanna, like Primavera, Bianca and Cortese, may be fanciful only. It would appear so from its position between Bianca and Cortese, unless indeed these are mere adjectives, which should be printed without capital letters.

The old reading in ll. 3 and 11 of Sonnet XLIV was *una donna*, but "Lisetta" is found in eight of the twelve MSS. containing the poem, and seems unquestionably right. A reply commencing *Lisetta voi della vergogna sciorre* was penned by Messer Aldobrandino Mezzabati of Padua—the Ildebrandinus Paduanus mentioned in the "De Vulgari Eloquentia"<sup>1</sup> as the only writer in Venetia that endeavoured to use the "curial" vulgar tongue in preference to his own dialect.

Canzone XIX has much in common with Canzone X. The subject is *leggiadria*, which may be rendered politeness or good breeding. Dante announces him-

<sup>1</sup> i, 14.

self as momentarily free from the shackles of love, and seizes the opportunity to read the world a lesson on conduct. As in Canzone X, he indicates a general apostasy from the high standard of manners that brought the word "courteous" into being; and just as in the "Convivio" he traverses the popular conception of a lady or gentleman as one who gives largely, so here he denounces reckless extravagance, luxury, and ostentation as heresy. The second stanza, which is devoted to this aspect of the subject, contains the unusual word *missione*, which means bounty, and is found also in the "Convivio."<sup>1</sup> It is borrowed from the Provençal, and Sordello employs it in a passage of his "Ensenhamen" on the proper exercise of liberality, which it is more than likely Dante had in his mind, since the troubadour insists *el metre obs mesura* ("there is need of measure in giving"). This stanza then combats the opposite vice to that which Dante castigates in Canzone X, but he seems to have regarded avarice and extravagance as different phases of the same vice, namely, *dismisura*, or the misuse of money. Those who transgress in either sense are consigned to the same circle of hell.<sup>2</sup>

In the third and fourth stanzas Dante treats of another heresy. This is the notion that a gay and careless exterior, coupled with commonplace ideas, constitutes good breeding. Dante shows that superficial charm is consistent with execrable traits. Many gentlemen (so-called) do not love a loving lady, and would not stir a foot to be a squire to any, but go to

<sup>1</sup> iv, 27.

<sup>2</sup> The fourth; see "Inf." vii.

snatch base pleasure, like a robber to his theft. Good breeding in a cavalier<sup>1</sup> is equivocal; it is not pure virtue, but virtue gone astray, and will not pass muster with "honest people of spiritual life or habit that holds to knowledge." The verb *disviare* is used by Dante in Canzone II (also "Purgatorio," xvi, 82), and he has a note upon it in the "Convivio," (iii, 3). For the general idea of strayed virtue, we may compare "Purgatorio," xvii, 85-139. Dante's attitude towards cavaliers is unprejudiced (*cf.* "Convivio," i, 9), but at best they are amateurs in virtue and learning. Here the picture is unfavourable. The phrase "persons who wear the semblance of man" takes us back to Canzone X and forward to the commencement of the "Convivio"; and similarly the apostrophe *O falsi cavalier*, etc., recalls *Falsi animali*. The women are not so far gone. They, at least, are not animals without understanding.

Pure virtue is found in the poets who are the high priests of Love. The sixth stanza has various reminiscences of Guinicelli's master ode, the simile of the sun, the mention of the gentle heart, etc., proving that pure virtue, in Dante's thought, is hardly distinguishable from love in the highest sense of the word. This stanza bears evident marks of pride of intellect; for, unlike the knights, content to be praised by the multitude, the virtuous man, says Dante, esteems the praise of uncultivated persons as little as their censure.

One distinction between pure and contaminated

<sup>1</sup> As used in this context the term "cavalier" corresponds as nearly as possible with our word "gallant."

virtue is in the matter of language. Here the poet has naturally a great advantage over his rival, the cavalier, and it would almost seem as if Canzone XIV were written on purpose to demonstrate the superiority, and to afford a specimen of good speech. In the *tornata* the poet cautions his song to be on its guard, if invited or detained by a cavalier. The stranger must be narrowly scanned, in order to discover whether he be qualified for its company; if not, he is to be quickly forsaken, for good consorts always with good. "Have nothing to do with the bad in understanding or accomplishment, since it was never accounted wisdom to hold their part."

Dante is not opposed to the chivalrous ideal of love, but to its desertion by the gentlemen of the day. Canzone XIV is full of the notion of service, and thus it stands related to Canzone XIX as obverse to reverse. Still, it must not be regarded as a mere academic performance, a model address commended to the notice of the true gentleman. There are certain phrases that connect the ode with other poems, and supply a clue to the possible subject. *Lieve saria* may be compared with *mi saria leve* in Sonnet XLVIII and *lieve mi conterei* in Canzone XX; and *se mercè giovinezza mi toglie* with *non soffrir che costei per giovinezza mi conduce a morte* in Canzone IX.

Canzone IX, like Canzone XIV, is addressed to men—"the three least guilty of our land." This language reminds us of what Ciacco says of Florence in the sixth canto of the "Inferno"<sup>1</sup>: "There are two

<sup>1</sup> l. 72.

just men; but they are not understood there." It has been conjectured that Cavalcanti was one of those just men, and it is possible that Lapo Gianni, or Dante himself, was the other. Who was the one that had fallen into a *mala setta*? Can it have been Forese Donati? Perhaps—if the canzone was indited before Dante's banishment, which we are inclined to question. Of one thing we feel convinced, that the fault of youth, which is so great a source of danger, is in the lady, not in the lover, as has been sometimes assumed. The idea, both here and in Canzone XIV, is that she is too young to appreciate the force of Dante's passion, not that she slights him as a boy. There is not the least sign of immaturity in these highly philosophical odes.

In none of the poems is the influence of Guinicelli more clearly seen than in this canzone, with its allusions to the heaven-born nature of Love and his affinity to the Sun, his moral efficacy, etc. Dante is at first only potentially a lover until desire is aroused by the sight of a maid, whose image is mirrored in his mind as in clear water, and he is all afire. This is mainly the work of Love, who is seconded by the lady's beauty, as the Sun might be by fire. The "worthy subject" is undoubtedly the gentle heart, but the metaphors are a little difficult to follow. *Segno* seems to mean the mark to which a thing tends, cf. "Purgatorio," xviii, 18-9: .

Then even as the fire doth upward move  
By its own form, which to ascend is born.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Canzoni xiv, 29; xx, 81; x, 17. The precise meta-



Canzoni XVIII and XX, and possibly Sonnet XLIX, belong to the period of Dante's exile. They breathe a passionate love of country and justice, and bitter hatred of the dominant faction. Sonnet XLIX, the authenticity of which is suspected, has all the appearance of being political, though the person addressed is probably Love, whom Dante often terms his master, and *i tuoi fedei* are his servants the poets, who are similarly designated in §§ III, VIII, of the "Vita Nuova." Poetry stands silenced before the strife of parties; she is cold, and naked, and affrighted. "The slayer of justice" may be Corso Donati, leader of the Neri, and "the grand tyrant" either the Pope or Philip of France, whom Dante calls elsewhere a giant and Goliath.<sup>1</sup> Donati wished to make himself tyrant of Florence. This seems to us the most probable explanation of the piece, though just conceivably the sonnet may be an appeal to the Almighty (*cf.* "Purgatorio," XX, 94-6). In that case the poem has a striking similarity to Milton's sonnet "On the late Massacre in Piedmont."

Canzone XVIII is, to our mind, by far the most splendid ode in the collection, and, as all the historical allusions with the exception of two—those to Pharaoh and Jugurtha—are to be found in the "Commedia," it was apparently written at a time when the latter work, or preparations for it, had made some progress. The canzone shows Dante in the maturity of his

phor is probably that of an ensign or banner to which troops rally.

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxxii, 152; Epistle vii, 8.

powers, and nothing in the "Commedia" is finer than this superb panegyric of Florence, which expresses the utmost reverence for her golden days, and the highest hopes of her future, if she will but change her pilot. She has to choose between fraternal peace and wolfish rapacity. By the "sister" of l. 3, Dante appears to mean Pistoia, whence the Black and White factions were imported into Florence; and the words "since thou art joined to Mars," are seemingly an allusion to the attack on Pistoia by the Florentine Black Guelfs and the Lucchesi, under the captaincy of Moroello Malaspina. Reference is made to this event in the twenty-fourth canto of the "Inferno":<sup>1</sup>

Mars draws up a vapour from Val di Magra.

Antenor is the second division of the ninth circle of Hell, in which traitors to their country are punished: see "Inferno," XXXII. The widowed lily—the *il tuo fior* of l. 32—is an allusion to the arms of Florence—a red lily in a field of white. Cf. "Paradiso," XVI, 152.

The lily

Never upon the spear was placed reversed.

It is called widowed, because Florence has lost the "loyal Fabricii." Those who do not march against the Bianchi are regarded, and punished, as traitors. They are "the submerged" of the first stanza and the *tornata*. Among the striking appeals, the most strik-

<sup>1</sup> l. 145. The canzone, however, must have been composed much later than 1305, unless the "Commedia" was begun long before commonly supposed.

ing, perhaps, is that in which he bids Florence desire the triumph of virtue, "so that the faith that lies hid may rise again with Justice, sword in hand." This figure of a resurrection recalls the expression in Sonnet XLIX: "with thy right hand repay him *who slays Justice*," and is an argument against the rejection of the latter poem.

Great interest attaches to Canzone XX on historical grounds. There has been some controversy on the question whether Dante was guilty of the charge for which he was banished. Lines 88-90 amount to an admission that he was not free from blame, but, in the face of his many protestations of innocence with regard to Florence, it seems to us doubtful whether in this passage he is speaking of any public crime. He has annoyed his lady, and is content to die in exile, provided that he is restored to her favour. This, we think, is the interpretation of the entire poem. Love, whose weapons have grown rusty from disuse, is to console the poet for his evil days and the manifold injustice to which he has been subjected. Love is his master, and Love is eternal. The mighty potentate is visited by three most beautiful and virtuous ladies in great distress. The eldest is Right. Like another Niobe, she rests on her hand, like a drooping rose, and her bare arm, a column of grief, feels the tear that falls from her face. With her are her daughter and granddaughter. The three are supposed to represent various aspects of justice—"natural disposition, universal human law, and political law."<sup>1</sup> If we are

<sup>1</sup> Gaspary, i, 247 (Bell).

guided by the "De Monarchia," we shall conclude that they stand for right in the abstract (*in mente Dei*—*divina voluntas*, II, 2), applied right (*jus in rebus*, *ibid.*), and municipal laws (I, 14).

## 5. THE PARGOLETTA AND PIETRA PROBLEMS

Canzone XX, then, is not purely political, unless we understand that Dante by "the beauteous mark of my eyes," means Florence. This seems to us impossible, as the hardships of his lot are precisely those involved in his exile. Some believe that the subject of Canzone XI is Florence, evidently on account of what is said in the *tornata*, but it seems to us that the very opposite conclusion should be drawn from the passage, in which he declares that he can no longer make war upon her, and that even if her cruelty relents, he is no more free to return, because he is chained to another spot. But he is *not* prevented from repairing to the spot where his lady is; on the contrary, he gravitates thither perforce (stanza 3). This is the chain that would, under any circumstances, withhold his steps from Florence; and, though we may detect some verbal inconsistency between the third stanza and the *tornata*—personally, we find none—the passion symbolized by the chain, whatever it may represent, is avowedly an antidote to Dante's unavailing love of country. It is perfectly clear that the two Canzoni, XX and XI, refer to the same counter attraction, which is evidently a person. Who was she

As far as can be gathered from Dante's own writings, there was only one lady with whom his name was connected after his banishment, *i.e.* Gentucca of Lucca, who was to make that city pleasant to him. The language in which Buonagiunta refers to her, suggests youth, even extreme youth:

A maid is born and wears not yet the veil.<sup>1</sup>

If we turn to a later passage in the "Purgatorio," in which Beatrice chides Dante for his unfaithfulness, we shall find that she hints at a succession of lapses—not merely his desertion to the Lady of Pity. "Beatrice," says the "Ottimo Comento,"<sup>2</sup> "tells him that neither the damsel whom he calls Pargoletta in his rhymes, nor Lisetta, nor that other mountain lady, nor any other whatsoever, ought to have turned the feathers of his wings in downward flight." The notion that there was a mountain lady may perhaps have been derived from Dante's description of Canzone XI as *montanina*, but it does not follow from the fact that the poem was written in the mountains, that the lady resided there. To the same source may be traced Boccaccio's statement that Dante fell in love with a woman of Pratovecchio. Such assertions are manifestly of a much lower order of credibility than Dante's own admission as to the maid of Lucca. On the whole, it seems likely that Beatrice refers to this youthful lady when she uses the term *pargoletta*,

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxiv, 43.

<sup>2</sup> "Purg." xxxi, 55-60.

<sup>3</sup> In a note on that passage.

but there is one little difficulty. Buonagiunta speaks of this affair, whatever it was, as future, whereas Beatrice is talking of the past. At the time when these cantos of the "Purgatorio" were written, it must have been past, and although Dante is usually observant of the fictitious date of the "Commedia"—1300—it is possible that in treating of his personal history he forgot or ignored his ordinary practice. His oldest biographers and commentators identify the Lucchese maiden with the *pargoletta*. Boccaccio says: "when he was living at Lucca, he often sighed for a certain damsel whom he calls Pargoletta";<sup>1</sup> and the "Anonimo Fiorentino," in a note on "Inferno," ii, 104, remarks: "After Beatrice's death he loved a damsel of Lucca, whom he calls Pargoletta, whence one of the ballads which he made for her begins: *I' mi son pargoletta bella et nova, et son venuta*, etc." The allusion is to Ballad VI.

We are here face to face with what is, beyond doubt, the greatest crux of the *Canzoniere*—the subject or subjects of the amatory poems. Ballad X, to judge from the "Convivio,"<sup>2</sup> is concerned with the Lady of Pity. With regard to the others, it is probable that they relate to the *pargoletta*. This is certainly the case with Sonnet XXVI, in which the word occurs in l. 2. We have seen that in Canzoni X and XIV the youth of one or other of the parties—almost certainly that of the lady—prevents Dante's suit from speeding; we should therefore be disposed

<sup>1</sup> "Milanesi," p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Canz. iii, 5; cf. Canz. ii, stanza 6.

to give both to the *pargoletta*, and with them Sonnet XLVII, because, like Canzone XIV, it lays stress on the *service* of love (*cf.* especially the expression *io son servente* in the former with *eccomi apparecchiato servo umile* in the latter). There is a great probability that Canzoni XX and XI refer to the *pargoletta*, because they were written, as the poems themselves show, when Dante was an exile, and we have seen that Sonnet XLVIII belongs to this set. All three also make it manifest that Dante was living at a distance from his lady. Now Canzone XII was pretty clearly addressed to the same person as Canzone XI, since the first stanza of the one practically reproduces the fifth stanza of the other. Canzone XII is one of the *pietra* poems, so called because in them Dante compares his obdurate mistress to a stone. There is a division of opinion as to whether the *pietra* and *pargoletta* were one and the same, but it seems necessary to identify them since Dante applied both terms to the subject of Canzone XV (ll. 13, 72). The other *pietra* poems are Sestine I, II, III, IV, of which the last two are generally believed to be spurious, and Sonnet XXXI. Just as Beatrice appears to allude to the *pargoletta* compositions, so she seems to touch upon those in which Dante iterates the thought that her rival is as hard as stone. In Canzone XV he asks what will become of himself, and he answers that, as the little maid has marble for a heart, he will become a man of marble. Similarly, he states that his mind is harder than stone in keeping a stern image of stone. In the thirty-third canto of the "Purgatorio" (ll. 75-6)



we find Beatrice saying to him, as if recalling these sentiments:

But since I see thee in thy intellect  
Converted into stone and stained with sin, etc.

Longfellow's translation here is hardly adequate. The Italian is *fatto di pietra, ed, impietrato, tinto*, the idea of petrification being expressed twice over. The *pietra* poems are frankly sensual, the climax being attained in Canzone XII, in which longings are avowed that explain Beatrice's language:

So low he fell that all appliances  
For his salvation seemed already short,  
Save showing him the people of perdition.

On the other hand, the *pargoletta* poems, except Canzone XV, which is also and pronouncedly of the *pietra* class, are moral, and even spiritual in tone and expression. Ballad VI might have been written of Beatrice herself, and it must be allowed that the term *pargoletta* would suit her very well as a little girl of eight. The same remark may be passed on Ballad IX, evidently a sister poem. Ballads VII and VIII are to be referred rather to the cycle which comprehends the sestina, a keyword of Sestina I being *verde*, and the fifth stanza being specially akin. To this category, too, belongs Sonnet XLII, with its notes of gaiety and optimism. The trilingual Canzone XXI is a *pietra* poem, the use of "thorn" as a metaphor serving as a connecting link between it and Canzone XV, the transitional ode.

It may be objected that Dante could not possibly

have written of the same person in such discrepant terms as are found in Ballad VI and Canzone XII, but he himself endeavours to reconcile a flagrant contradiction between Canzoni II and III in the *tornata* of the latter. No notice need be taken of the statement of Amadi, a sixteenth-century Paduan writer, that the *pietra* was really Madonna Pietra of the noble family of the Scrovigni of Padua. There may or may not have been such a woman, but there is no good reason for associating her with these poems.

We have indicated two echoes of the *Canzoniere* in the "Commedia," and it seems worth while to call attention to a third. In Ballads VI and IX we meet with the phrase *mirar fiso* ("to look steadfastly"). If we turn to ll. 1-9 of the thirty-second canto of the "Purgatorio," we shall find a transfiguration of this phrase, which is not peculiar to Dante, but a commonplace of the *dolce stil nuovo*.

Sonnet XXVIII is a compendium of chapters xiv and xv of the second book of the "Convivio," while Sonnet XLIII is a recantation of the misapplication of his muse to philosophy, and particularly apposite to the second and fourth books of that learned treatise.

## 6. A POETICAL DUEL

The *Canzoniere* concludes with a *tenzone*—what is termed in old Scots a "flyting-match"—between Dante and Forese Donati. The latter was not the Forese Donati who was a son of Manetto and a brother of Gemma, Dante's wife, but a kinsman, the

son of Simone and a brother of Corso Donati. Dante and he were friends in youth,<sup>1</sup> and in the twenty-third canto of the "Purgatorio" there is recorded an interview between them, which points to their having shared a loose kind of life. Forese, in particular, appears to have been a glutton, and from the innuendo contained in Sonnet LII one gathers that he was not faithful to the wife whom he extols so highly in the "Purgatorio."<sup>2</sup> The authenticity of these sonnets, once questioned, may now be considered completely established, but the precise meaning of them is not easily grasped, and in several instances commentators and translators have entirely mistaken it. The accusation against Forese in Sonnet LII is that he neglects his wife in a marital sense, and this charge is repeated at the close of Sonnet LIV. A very different impression would be obtained from Rossetti's translation—that Forese and his brothers were "nice brothers-in-law"! The "Alaghier" of Forese's reply to Sonnet LII is obviously the same person as the "Allaghieri" of his reply to Sonnet LIV—namely, Dante's father; Del Lungo understands Dante himself. In Sonnet LIII Dante rallies Forese on his love for starlings' breasts and lambs' tails, and tells him that his skin will take vengeance for the flesh; that is, he will get the itch. In Sonnet LIV he tells him that he is a thief, and raises doubts as to his legitimacy.

O Bicci, pretty son of who knows whom,  
Unless thy mother, Lady Tessa, tell,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> xxiii, 91 *et seq.*

Thy gullet is already crammed too well,  
Yet others' food thou needs must now consume, etc.

Forese retorts:

Right well I know thou'rt Alighieri's son.

And he proceeds to taunt Dante with his failing to resent injuries, and his omission to perform some act of vengeance. It has been supposed that this is an allusion to the murder of his relative, Geri del Bello, which is mentioned in the twenty-ninth canto of the "Inferno."

We must be content with a very brief reference to the translations of the "Seven Penitential Psalms" and the "Profession of Faith," which are all in *terza rima*. There appears to be hardly any reason, internal or external, for connecting the metrical versions of the psalms with Dante. They are of no great excellence and Witte could not find them in any manuscript. On the other hand, he discovered the "Profession of Faith" in a very large number of codices to which the name of Dante was attached. Scartazzini suggests that it was a juvenile exercise, but from the opening words it would appear to have been the work of Dante's old age. The rest of the poem is a paraphrase of the Creed, the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ave Maria.

## CHAPTER III

### THE "CONVIVIO"

#### I. TITLE

UNTIL a comparatively recent date, the title of this treatise was usually given as "Convito." The fashion was started by Biscioni in his Florentine edition of 1723, and may be said to have held its ground till the publication of Witte's "Dante-Forschungen," vol. ii, in 1879. There is not the slightest difference in the meaning of the two words "Convito" and "Convivio," both of which occur in the treatise. It is merely a question of which has most support from the manuscripts, and Witte produced convincing evidence that the best texts are overwhelmingly in favour of "Convivio."

Both "Convivio" and "Convito" signify "a banquet," and the title may be regarded as in some sort a translation of the Greek word *συμπόσιον*, as used by philosophical writers. Dante explains in what sense he intended it to be taken in the first chapter of Book I, in which he tells us that he proposes to discuss fourteen canzoni. These will form the meat, and the bread will consist of the exposition. Dante's object is to satisfy

those who hunger for knowledge, but for various reasons are unable to cater for themselves. The chief obstacle is the fact that, as things are, it is impossible to acquire philosophy or science without proficiency in Latin. Many worthy persons—princes, barons, cavaliers, and ladies—lack that accomplishment, and are therefore debarred from participating in those intellectual pleasures, to which Latin is the key. In the present treatise Dante breaks down the middle wall of partition by adopting the vulgar tongue as the medium of instruction, thus rendering its contents more widely accessible than if he had followed the ordinary rule (which he obeyed in the case of the "De Monarchia," and the "De Vulgari Eloquentia") of employing Latin for scientific and philosophical purposes. The "Convivio" is, in fact, the first work of the kind in Italian prose.

## 2. DATE

With regard to the date of the composition, it seems probable that it was written, not continuously, but in instalments. Dante does indeed state in the work itself, that it was produced after the period of *gioventute*,<sup>1</sup> that is, after his forty-fifth year or 1310. But there are allusions in Book IV, which prove that it was written earlier. Thus in chapter vi he addresses Charles II of Naples and Frederick of Aragon: "And I say to you, Charles and Frederick, Kings." Now the former of those potentates died on 5th March, 1309

<sup>1</sup> i, 1.

Similarly in chapter iii he uses the expressions: "Frederick of Suabia, the last Emperor and King of the Romans, I say last with respect to the present time, notwithstanding that Rudolph, and Adolphus and Albert have been elected since his death and those of his descendants." Hence it is evident that Dante was not aware of the coronation of Henry VII, which took place at Aix on 6th January, 1309. On the other hand, this fourth book cannot have been written before 1307, since, in chapter xiv he speaks of Gherardo da Camino as dead, and Gherardo died on 5th March, 1307. There is no doubt, therefore, that Book IV, or certain passages in it, were in existence before the date assigned to the treatise as a whole. Some even go so far as to argue that parts of the work were written before Dante's banishment, and it is not impossible that he incorporated in it a number of notes and comments that he had jotted down during the last decade of the thirteenth century.

The truth is apparently that in the course of the year 1310 there occurred to Dante the idea of writing a philosophic commentary on fourteen of his canzoni as a kind of sequel to the "*Vita Nuova*," which contains similar elements. He then elaborated the first book, which was to serve as an introduction, and utilized the materials that he had collected, probably for general reasons, in the three succeeding books. Then came the invasion of Italy by Henry VII, which distracted Dante from his task, and by the time he was ready to resume it, he had either lost all relish for the occupation, or was eager to press on



with the great poem which was to render his name immortal. Anyhow, the treatise was never finished, and of the fourteen canzoni, of which he promises an interpretation, only three are provided with a commentary.

### 3. MOTIVES

It will appear extraordinary that Dante should have chosen this mode of initiating his countrymen into the mysteries of science. We have seen of what his canzoni consist. A few are ethical, one or two deal in a more or less formal fashion with Platonic conceptions of love, but most of them are erotic, and some downright sensual. It was on these amatory poems that it was Dante's good pleasure to impose a philosophical meaning. Why? Obviously, because he considered that they redounded little to his credit, and therefore it was politic to explain away their plain purport, which even a fool could not mistake, by representing them as allegorical. Dante hardly troubles to disguise his motive. At the close of the second chapter of Book I, he observes: "I was moved by fear of infamy and desire of bestowing learning, which none other can truly bestow. I fear the infamy of having been led away by so much passion, as any one reading the afore-named canzoni conceives to have been master in me. Which infamy is entirely arrested by my present style of speaking, which shows that the motive has been not passion, but virtue. I intend also to show the true meaning of them, which can be discerned by none, unless I make

it known, because it is hidden under a mask of allegory. And this will afford not only rare pleasure in the hearing, but subtle instruction both in thus speaking and in thus understanding the writings of others."

From the tenor of the two succeeding chapters we may judge that Dante was influenced by a third motive, or what may be termed an extension of the second motive. He was not only afraid that the contents of some of his poems might convey an unfavourable impression of his moral character, but he was haunted by a feeling that his personality and writings met with less respect than was due to them from those—and they were nearly all the inhabitants of Italy—to whom he presented himself as an indigent exile and wanderer. In order that he might regain his lost dignity, he made a display of his talents and attainments in a form in which they could be appreciated by the multitude, that is, in an Italian encyclopaedia. The "*Convivio*," despite its importance, is not much studied, but most readers will be acquainted with the pathetic and eloquent terms in which he laments his banishment from Florence and all its train of ills.<sup>1</sup>

That concern for his reputation was the dominant reason which led to the undertaking of the work is evident in almost every line of Book I, which, as we have said, is a general introduction to the remainder of the treatise, and sets forth in a regular and systematic manner its aims, limitations, and characteristics. At the outset he emphasizes the value of knowledge as

<sup>1</sup> "*Conv.*" i, 3; cf. "*Par.*" xvii, 46-61.

the acmé of human perfection, and it was this precious possession which distinguished him, even more than his poetic gift, from the buffoons, actors, and other parasites that thronged to the court of Can Grande and other nobles, whose hospitality he was reduced to accept as an alternative to starvation. This hospitality he requited by admitting them as guests to his banquet of philosophy, thus establishing a kind of equality between him and them.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. APOLOGIES

Dante realizes that the execution of his task is beset by certain difficulties, which are, in some respects, insurmountable. A philosophic work should not be tainted with egotism, but, as he is anxious to stand well in the eyes of the world, there is an obvious temptation to speak of himself. He, however, accepts the principle of reserve with two exceptions. One of these is where silence would be a source of danger and disgrace. In the case of his exile, for instance, judgement might go by default. The other exception is where a writer may confer an important benefit on his readers by personal allusions. Dante cites the "Confessions" of St. Augustine as an instance, but he had doubtless in his mind the "Vita Nuova" and those portions of the "Convivio" in which he exposes the literal sense of his poems. It is worthy of note that Dante is extremely chary of mentioning his own name. In the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" he

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Epistle X, § 3.

refers to himself as Cino's friend, and in the thirtieth canto of the "Purgatorio,"<sup>1</sup> where Beatrice addresses him as "Dante," he enters an apology:

At the sound I turned of my own name,  
Which of necessity is here recorded.

As regards the commentary, Dante anticipates two criticisms. The first is its difficulty. Naturally the object of any commentary is to elucidate the text of which it treats, but if the commentary itself is obscure, the trouble, instead of being remedied, is only aggravated. Dante acknowledges the force of the objection, and replies that if his prose is not quite plain, this is the effect, not of ignorance, but of reflection. He desires to raise his credit, and he hopes to achieve this result by producing a somewhat weighty work, written in a dignified style, and possessing claims to authority.

Secondly, he has to meet the censure of learned men for preferring Italian to Latin, and thus violating long-established tradition. The main grounds on which Dante defends this procedure are eminently reasonable. They are three in number. (i.) The canzoni, to which the commentary is attached, are Italian compositions, and therefore it would be most incongruous and irregular to employ Latin for their interpretation, for, Latin being esteemed the superior language, the commentary would appear of more importance than the text. (ii.) The use of Latin would restrict the benefit to comparatively few. True, many

<sup>1</sup> ll. 55, 62-3.

foreigners are acquainted with Latin, but they are ignorant of Italian, and could not appreciate the beauty of the odes, whereas many Italians of rank and talent, by their lack of learning, would be debarred from the advantages to be obtained from the commentary. (iii.) One has a proper and natural love of one's own language.

Dante develops these arguments at considerable length and in a manner that would then have been deemed "subtle." His points are often fanciful, and even puerile, and his method is scholastic, though not to the same degree as in the "De Monarchia." In the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" <sup>1</sup> Dante discovers in Latin an element of permanence that is wanting in Italian. His observations in that treatise regarding the rapid changes in the vocabulary of the Italian dialects anticipate the fifth chapter of the present book, in which he ascribes the phenomenon to artificial caprice. In reality, it was due in part to the absence of literary standards which it is one of his most conspicuous services—in common with those who shared his artistic instincts in relation to the *illustre vulgare*—to have introduced. He did not, and could not, know that the mutation which he noted as going on in the Italian vernaculars was the working out of a law to which all human speech, like other organisms, is eternally subject. A brief citation from Peile's excellent little "Primer of Philology" <sup>2</sup> will illustrate to us how, in this respect, "the great world spins for ever down the ringing grooves of change."

<sup>1</sup> i, 9; so also "Conv." i, 5.

<sup>2</sup> P. 74.

“‘Derive’ came down to us, and we know its history; it meant to draw down a stream (*rivus* in Latin), and was first of all used only in a literal sense, then metaphorically; and we can trace *rivus* back to a root *sru*, ‘to run,’ and that may have come from a simpler root *sar*, and there we stop. We know nothing of the previous history of *sar*, neither did our forefathers.

“Here then is the difference between the two; we know all about *derive*, probably no one ever did know anything about *sar*. But there is no reason to suppose that *sar* is essentially different from *derive*, that it had no older form, or that many other forms had not been formed from it, and died before the Indo-European period. Neither must we suppose that many other combinations of sounds, as well as *sar*, did not exist, and then died out, when, for some reason or other, *sar*, with all its derivatives, took people’s fancy more. Depend upon it, there was a history of language in those days, which will never be written any more than the other history of prehistoric man. There is no new thing under the sun; the thing which is, that thing has also been. Speech grew and decayed then as now.”

## 5. ON TRANSLATING POETRY

At the close of Chapter VII, Dante makes some very just remarks on the impossibility of translating poetry bodily from one language into another. He recognizes, of course, that the sense can be conveyed, but the music and the charm have to be sacrificed. I

is for this reason, he says, that no attempt was made to translate Homer into Latin, and that the Psalter dispenses with metre, this feature having disappeared when it was rendered from Hebrew into Greek. It must not be inferred that Dante had any knowledge of either of those languages. He occasionally refers to Homer as if he was familiar with his writings; *e.g.*, in § 1 of the "Vita Nuova," but all his citations are culled from Latin authors or Latin translations of Aristotle. To Dante, Homer was merely a great tradition, and the legends of which the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are the splendid and immortal shrines passed into his possession incidentally through reading Virgil and other Latin classics, or by the meaner channel of Dictys and Dares. As for Hebrew, that was still more inaccessible to the eager student in the Dark Ages, from which Italy had not yet emerged.

This passage is of peculiar interest on account of innumerable experiments in translating the "Commedia." It is admitted that something must go, and, if Dante could be consulted, we may be certain from his statement in the twelfth chapter of Book II, that while the beauty of a poem is delightful, its goodness (*i.e.* its substance or meaning) is still more so, which element he would most desire to see preserved. His observations here, however, prove, what we already know, that Dante attached extreme importance to the artistic features of poetry—diction, rhyme, rhythm, etc. Stripped of these ornaments, it hardly seemed to him poetry at all. His translators, many of them, have been possessed by the same sentiment, and, fascinated by



the incomparable charm of the *terza rima*, have sought to present the poem to the English reader in that most difficult metre. Every such attempt spells qualified or unqualified failure, since the exigences of rhyming necessitate continual and at times offensive tampering with the sense of the original, which is weakened now by the omission of a word that can be ill spared, now by the importation of a meretricious epithet that spoils the dignity of a phrase. If these defects are avoided, as is wellnigh impossible, it is at the cost of the rhythm, the harshness of which cruelly belies the graceful cadence of the Italian verse.

A former famous Master of Balliol—Jowett—once remarked to the present writer that “the soul of translation is compromise.” He was thinking probably of his own versions of Plato, but the dictum is as true of verse as of prose. Longfellow bowed to the necessity by rejecting rhyme. In this way he succeeded in presenting a metrical rendering of extraordinary fidelity, which reproduces at once the sense and the form, as far as that can be achieved without the accompaniment of rhyme, more satisfactorily than any of its rivals. It may be questioned, however, whether his determination to surrender nothing but the rhyme and conserve all the other features of the “*Commedia*,” even to the collocation of the words, has not resulted in a version intrinsically harder than the original, for the latter rests on a different grammatical basis, and is rendered more easily intelligible by a richer variety of inflections.

## 6. PATRIOTISM

In this treatise Dante concedes what he denies in the "De Vulgari Eloquentia,"<sup>1</sup> that Latin is superior to Italian;<sup>2</sup> but he warmly opposes the contention, to which many of his own countrymen subscribe, that Italian is not so fine a language as Provençal.<sup>3</sup> He expects to disprove this odious verdict in his comments on his own poems. Meanwhile he explores the causes of a judgment so contrary to fact. In this inquiry, as also in his chapters on the making and marring of reputations, Dante displays much insight into the nooks and crannies of imperfect human nature, whilst the conclusion of the book reveals the nobler traits of his own character in addition to his intellectual keenness and discernment. He, for one, has firm faith in the capabilities of his native tongue; and he accepts it as a filial duty to enhance its distinction.

## 7. THE POEMS

It is somewhat curious that the sequence of the canzoni placed at the head of the second, third, and fourth books is not chronological. Canzone I is closely related to §§ xxxviii and xxxix of the "Vita Nuova," and describes the mental conflict that attended the transition from Dante's first love to his second. Canzone II was written when the triumph of the second love was complete—a phase of which there is no indication in the "Vita Nuova," whilst Canzone III

<sup>1</sup> i, I.<sup>2</sup> "Conv." i, 5.<sup>3</sup> "Conv." i, II.

(which treats, not of love, but of one of the conditions of love, nobility of character) must have been composed in the interval, since Dante plainly alludes to a breach in the *tornata* of Canzone II, where the words *fera e disdegnosa* correspond with *disdegnosi e feri* in Canzone III. The Lady of Pity has developed, or Dante thinks she has developed, ungracious traits, which divert him temporarily from his accustomed theme of love.

### 8. QUADRUPLE MEANING

Dante applies to his odes the same fourfold system of interpretation which, as we have learned from Epistle X, governs the understanding of the "Commedia." To the moral and mystic senses, however, he devotes but slight attention, occupying himself almost entirely with the literal and allegorical meanings. Thus chapters ii-xii of Book II are concerned with the exposition of Canzone I as a love-poem; and chapters xiii-xvi unfold its symbolical intention. In Book III the literal aspects of Canzone II take up the first ten chapters, and its allegorical sense the remainder. As Canzone III is a philosophical poem, the contents of Book IV are more uniform than of those which precede. There being no allegory, it is necessary to take account of the literal meaning, and that alone.

The literal interpretation of the poems reminds us of the procedure adopted in the "Vita Nuova"; since it explains the divisions of the odes, elucidates difficult

phrases, and comprises remarks on poetical and rhetorical technique, combined with longer or shorter digressions on philosophic questions, to which particular allusions give rise. The allegorical sections profess to reveal the "hidden truth" of the poetry, and show in detail the relevancy of the expressions to the pursuit of learning. Thus, if the lady is "proud and disdainful" (*cf.* Milton's terms "harsh and crabbed," "dull fools'" opinion of "divine philosophy"), the real meaning is that Dante was unable to comprehend the proofs, to follow the train of argument.

#### 9. PHILOSOPHIC AUTHORITIES

As regards the relations between the "Vita Nuova" and the "Convivio" enough has been said in the previous chapters. Accordingly, we shall confine ourselves to the philosophical topics discussed in the treatise. The "Vita Nuova," the "De Vulgari Eloquentia," the "De Monarchia," and the "De Aqua et Terra," all contain similar ingredients in the shape of passing references, but, in order to avoid tiresome repetition, we omitted to deal with those incidental allusions in anticipation of our present task. Study of the "Convivio" will not only throw light on certain dark places in the writings named, but will advance us a considerable way towards the comprehension of the "Commedia."

First, we must briefly review Dante's sources. In most of his minor works he constantly appeals to one

supreme authority, whom he calls the Philosopher. This supreme authority is Aristotle. In the ninth chapter of the first book of the "Convivio" he mentions him by name, and styles him his master. Now Dante did not know Greek, and therefore he could not read Aristotle in the original. He had to depend on translations, of which, as we learn from "Convivio," II, 15, there were two—"the old," and "the new." By "the old," he appears to have meant the translation made by Michael Scot from the Arabic into Latin, and by "the new," that of Thomas Aquinas from the Greek into Latin. There is no reason to doubt that Dante was personally acquainted with these versions, but in various instances in which he cites Aristotle, his information has actually been derived from classical or mediaeval authors.

Another Greek philosopher whom he invokes—seven times in the "Convivio" and once in the "De Monarchia"—is Pythagoras. Here there is no question of his consulting the wise man's writings, even in the form of translations, since Pythagoras did not leave any. Dante therefore was indebted for what he knew of this philosopher's opinions to the same sources from which he drew his notions of Aristotle. The passages<sup>1</sup> in which he discusses the origin of the term "philosopher," are based either on Cicero's "Tusculanae Quaestiones" (v, 3), or on St. Augustine's "De Civitate Dei" (vii, 2; xviii, 25). Dante cites the latter work in the "De Monarchia" (iii, 4). Both in the "Convivio" (iv, 8, 15, 24, 25, 27), and

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." ii, 16; iii, 11.

the "De Monarchia" (ii, 5, 8, 10), he culls from Cicero's "De Officiis"; and, owing to a lapse of memory, he attributes to Aristotle the sentiment, apparently derived from that treatise (ii, 11), "that justice is beloved even by her foes."<sup>1</sup>

In "Convivio," iv, 13, Dante speaks vaguely of "the Commentator," which description he employs also in the "De Aqua et Terra" (§§ 5, 18). This, in the Middle Ages, was a common appellation of the Arabian philosopher Averroës, and the allusion, as is evident from the context, is to the commentary on Aristotle. Compare "Inferno," iv, 144:

Averroës, who the great Comment made.

This line follows immediately on the mention of Avicenna, who is cited in the "De Convivio" (ii, 14, 15; iii, 14; iv, 21), and another Arabian philosopher whose name occurs in the treatise is Algazel, Averroës' master.

Dante had studied Albertus Magnus—"Albert of Cologne" ("Paradiso," x, 98)—whom he mentions in "Convivio," iii, 7; iv, 23, but the acknowledgements he there makes express not a tithe of his obligations to that doctor, to whom he owed much of his Aristotelian and other philosophy. Albertus, who was born in 1193 and died in 1280, misled Dante with regard to the opinion that the kindling of vapours about the planet Mars portends the deaths of kings and the transformation of kingdoms.<sup>2</sup> Albertus and Dante after him attribute this belief to Albumazar, an

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." i, 12.

<sup>2</sup> "Conv." ii, 14.

Arabian philosopher born at Balkh, in Turkestan, in 805, but, as far as can be ascertained from his writings, Albumazar never said anything of the kind.

In the second book of the "Convivio" (chapter vi), reference is made to a *Libro dell' aggregazione delle stelle*, and later in the treatise<sup>1</sup> we meet with the name of its author, Alfraganus, who was born at Fergana in Sogdiana, and flourished in the early part of the ninth century. His works were translated into Latin about 1242, under the title of "Alfragani Elementa Astronomica"—it is believed, by Johannes Hispalensis—and were used in the "Vita Nuova" as well as here.

In the course of the treatise Dante cites Plato. We have seen that his knowledge of Homer was derived from sporadic allusions in the Latin classics; his acquaintance with Platonic philosophy was due in like manner to references occurring in the writings of Aristotle, Albertus Magnus, Cicero, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. But whereas, as he tells us, there was no translation of Homer, there existed a Latin version of Plato's "Timaeus," to which Dante might have had access. It was known to his master, Albertus Magnus. One of Dante's text-books was the "Summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas, whom he mentions several times in the "Convivio," while in Epistle X he names the "De Consideratione" of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the "De Contemplatione" of Richard of St. Victor as works profitable to study.

<sup>1</sup> Ch. 14.



## 10. DEGREE OF ORIGINALITY

The "Convivio," then, is in no real sense original; such evidence of independence as it contains is probably accidental, and due to forgetfulness of the teachings of authorities. Thus in "Convivio," ii, 16, he states that the fallen angels, whose place was to have been filled by the creation of man, belonged to all the orders of the celestial hierarchy. This is directly opposed to the affirmations of St. Thomas, who lays it down that the Seraphim, the Thrones, and the Dominations remained faithful, and that the rebel host was recruited from the Cherubim, the Powers, and the Principalities.

In small matters, in respect of "mint and cummin," Dante thinks for himself. In one instance this exhibition of free-will is attributable, in an equal degree, to ignorance and learning, or, on the unlikely hypothesis that he was fully cognisant of the facts, to the hopeless disagreement of those whose judgment he would otherwise have accepted. It is recorded in the Gospels of St. Matthew<sup>1</sup> and St. Mark<sup>2</sup> that the angel said to Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" at the sepulchre, "Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee." Christian homilists were not content with the bare literal meaning of these words; they sought to attach to them a figurative sense. What did "Galilee" signify? St. Augustine said that it is by interpretation "transmigration" or "revelation." St. Jerome, on the other

<sup>1</sup> xxviii, 7.<sup>2</sup> xvi, 7.

hand, held it to denote "capacity to turn" or "a wheel." Most writers appear to have favoured the first explanation with the addition "accomplished." This still leaves a considerable amount of obscurity, but St. Thomas Aquinas makes everything plain by his definitions. "Galilee," he says, "according to the interpretation 'transmigration,' signifies heathendom (*gentilitatem*); but according to the interpretation 'revelation,' it signifies the heavenly fatherland."

Whether Dante was aware of this traditional divergence or the various ways in which the name "Galilee" had been explained, does not appear—probably not, for with his eagerness for subtle disquisitions he would have endeavoured to make something of the discovery. Meanwhile a new interpretation had been broached that connected the name with the Greek word γάλα ("milk"), and Isidore of Seville affirmed that Galilee was so called because it produced fairer people than Palestine. The same account is given in Uguccione's "Magnae Derivationes," and in the same words, except that "Palestine" is emended to "any other part of Palestine." Now Dante, as will be seen from "Convivio," iv, 6, was familiar with Uguccione's work, and he confidently informs us that "Galilee" is equivalent to "whiteness." "Whiteness" is a symbolical expression for speculation or science, and thus the meaning of the angel's words, as reported by St. Mark—Dante quotes St. Mark, not St. Matthew—is that Blessedness will go before the disciples in the search for truth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." iv, 22.

## II. PHILOLOGY

Dante names Uguccione only once, but in various passages where he expounds the meaning of Greek terms, he is really paraphrasing that writer's Latin ("Convivio," ii, 4; iii, 9, 11; iv, 6; "Epist." x, 10). His derivations of Italian and Latin words ("Convivio," ii, 8; iii, 13; iv, 24) and Hebrew names ("De Vulgari Eloquentia," i, 6, 7), are borrowed from Uguccione. Dante's general vocabulary includes a number of words of Greek origin, which might lead us to suspect that, after all, he had some knowledge of that language, but, in every instance, the "little learning" can be traced to Uguccione's etymological dictionary, to Cicero, or to translations of Aristotle. Uguccione was a native of Pisa, born about the middle of the twelfth century. He was for some time professor of ecclesiastical jurisprudence at Bologna, and afterwards Bishop of Ferrara. He died in 1210.

## 12. ASTRONOMY

Philology forms but a small element of the "Convivio." The greater part of the second book is devoted to astronomy, this procedure being dictated by the necessity of explaining the opening line of Canzone I, which is addressed to "ye who, intelligent, the third heaven move." Dante first discusses the number of the heavens, and here he takes the unusual course of differing from Aristotle, whose authority in philo-

sophical matters he, in the sixth chapter of Book IV, pronounces final. Aristotle held that there were eight heavens, ending with that of the Fixed Stars, and he had wrong conceptions of their relative positions, but that prince of philosophers made no secret of the fact that he was guided by the opinions of others with regard to astronomy.

Dante, if he was to remain orthodox, not only in science, but in religion, was bound to accept the Ptolemaic system, which had become part of Christianity. In § xxx of the "*Vita Nuova*," he states that "according to Ptolemy *and the Christian truth*, the heavens that move are nine." In the "*Convivio*" (ii, 4), he says that *the Catholics* place the Empyrean heaven, which they regard as motionless, outside the nine mobile heavens, and he adds that "this is the place of the blessed spirits according to the Holy Church, *which cannot lie*."

Dante conceived of the earth as the centre of the universe. In the fifth chapter of the third book he makes mention of various philosophical theories with regard to it. The first is that of Pythagoras and his followers, that the world is one of the stars, that over against it is another star called Antichthon, that both are included in the same sphere which revolves from east to west, and that this revolution is the reason why the sun is sometimes visible and sometimes not. Next he cites Plato's opinion that earth and sea are the centre of all things, and that the world revolves on its axis conformably with the original motion of the heaven, but very slowly, owing to its mass and its distance

from the heaven. Finally, he records Aristotle's judgment that the earth stands still, and is in a condition of perpetual fixedness. He does not trouble to recapitulate Aristotle's arguments, affirming that his "great authority" suffices.

The nine mobile heavens revolve round the earth in the following order. The first, or nearest, is that of the moon, the second that of Mercury, the third that of Venus, the fourth that of the Sun, the fifth that of Mars, the sixth that of Jupiter, the seventh that of Saturn, the eighth that of the Fixed Stars, and the ninth the Crystalline Heaven, otherwise known as the *Primum Mobile*. He accounts for the motion of these heavens on the mystic principle that the ninth heaven, whence it is communicated to all the rest, is actuated in all its parts by a fervent desire for union with the stationary Empyrean, which is the most divine and the abode of Deity. The heavens revolve with a velocity proportioned to their proximity to the Empyrean, the most rapid being the Crystalline, and the slowest that of the Moon. The third heaven is distinguished by the presence of a little sphere situated "on the back of" its equator. In this epicycle, which has its own revolution, is the planet Venus.

### 13. ANGELOLOGY

The motions of the heavens, which are diaphanous, but material,<sup>1</sup> are directed by certain Intelligences

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." ii, 7; "Par." xxviii, 64.

commonly called Angels, which are immaterial, and their touch or impact is not corporeal but intellectual. Here again Dante breaks with Aristotle, who taught that there were no Intelligences beyond those so employed, since there were no spheres in which they could exercise their activity. Dante shows that just as with men there are two kinds of happiness, one the civil, the other the contemplative life, and of the two the latter is the more excellent and divine, so it is with the angels. Some are engaged in this ministry; others are devoted to pure contemplation. Dante notices in passing the Platonic view that there are as many Intelligences as there are ideas or archetypes, and also the error of the heathen, who, in their ignorance, transformed intelligences into gods and goddesses, and worshipped their images. Dante was no doubt thinking of the names of the planets—Mars, Mercury, Venus, etc.—which are applied to the heavens over which the Intelligences severally preside.

There are three hierarchies, and in each hierarchy there are three orders. The first hierarchy, by which is meant the lowest and nearest to man, consists of Angels, Archangels, and Thrones. The second is composed of Dominations, Virtues, and Principalities; and the third, of Powers, Cherubim and Seraphim. The motors of the Heaven of the Moon are stated to be the Angels, those of the Heaven of Mercury the Archangels, and those of the Heaven of Venus the Thrones. In the eighth canto of the "*Paradiso*,"<sup>1</sup> Dante tacitly

<sup>1</sup> ll. 34-7.

corrects this account, as regards the third heaven, and assigns the service to the Principalities.

We turn around with the celestial Princes,  
One gyre and one gyration and one thirst,  
To whom thou in the world of old didst say,  
*Ye who, intelligent, the third heaven are moving.*

And similarly in the ninth canto:<sup>2</sup>

Above us there are mirrors, Thrones you call them.

In the twenty-eighth canto of the same *cantica*, the Angels, Archangels, and Principalities form the first triad; the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers, the second; the Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim, the third and highest.

#### 14. ALLEGORY

In the later chapters of Book II Dante expounds the canzone on which it is based, in an allegorical sense. The lady of which it speaks is Philosophy, and the ten heavens are likened to ten sciences, which have a fixed centre round which they revolve—namely, the subject—whilst they impart light, and implant perfection in those natures that are responsive to their influence. The order of the sciences, corresponding with that of the heavens, is as follows: Grammar (or Latin); Dialectic; Rhetoric; Arithmetic; Music; Geometry; Astronomy; Natural Science (Physics and Metaphysics); Moral Science (or Ethics); and Theology.

<sup>1</sup> l. 61.



## 15. MORE ASTRONOMY

The paragraph on grammar is noteworthy, partly because it contradicts what is said in the "*De Vulgari Eloquentia*" regarding the invariableness of Latin, and partly because the explanation here given of the spots in the moon is formally refuted in the second canto of the "*Paradiso*." In other passages Dante sets forth astronomical data borrowed from Alfraganus, whose calculations, however, he is content to give approximately. In Chapter VII he indicates the extraordinary virtue of the planet Venus by a reference to its distance, which, he declares, is one hundred and sixty-seven times as great as the diameter of the earth, which is three thousand two hundred and fifty miles. This makes the distance between the earth and Venus 542,750 miles. The actual distance, of course, varies, Venus being nearer to the earth at one time than another. In Chapter XIV we are informed in a similarly circuitous manner that the diameter of Mercury is two hundred and thirty-two miles. Mercury, it is true, is the smallest of the planets, being only three times as large as the moon, but its diameter greatly exceeds Dante's measurement. It may be observed that this planet, instead of being nearest to the earth, is nearest to the sun. In the eighth chapter of Book IV Dante, contradicting the axiom laid down in the "*De Aqua et Terra*" that every opinion opposed to the evidence of the senses is bad, maintains that opinions formed on such evidence are apt to be most false. He instances the case of the sun, which seems to be no

more than a foot in diameter. In reality, he says, its diameter is five and a half times that of the earth, or, in other words, 35,750 miles.

The Heaven of the Fixed Stars travels from west to east at the rate of one degree in a hundred years; hence it follows that since the creation of the world, which is supposed to have taken place five thousand years or more before Christ, it has accomplished little more than a sixth of its course. Saturn occupies twenty-nine years and more in completing the circle of the zodiac, whilst the revolutions of the other planets are given as follows: Jupiter, twelve years; Mars, two years; the Sun, Venus, and Mercury, three hundred and sixty-five days; and the Moon, twenty-nine days. The lunar month, according to Alfraganus, is 29 days  $12\frac{3}{4}$  hours—an important difference, but throughout Dante treats considerable fractions as negligible quantities.

Like the earth, the heaven has two poles, one of which is the polar star, or in the neighbourhood of the polar star, and an equator parallel with the terrestrial equator. In the fifth chapter of Book III, after making these statements, he goes on to describe the ecliptic or apparent path of the Sun from west to east. This he does quite correctly; and in the same chapter he computes the dimensions of the earth. If, he says, a stone were to fall from the celestial North Pole, it would fall in the ocean at a point where, if a man were standing, the polar star would be immediately overhead. Dante supposes that there are two cities, Maria and Lucia, situated at the terrestrial North and

South Pole respectively. From Rome to Maria in a direct line he calculates would be 2,700 miles, and from Rome to Lucia 7,500 miles. Thus the entire circumference of the globe would be 20,400 miles. He points out that the inhabitants of Maria would have their feet exactly opposite to those of the inhabitants of Lucia, thus expressing the idea conveyed by the word antipodes.

In "Convivio," iii, 6, and iv, 23, attention is drawn to the difference between equal and unequal (or temporal) hours. Day and night together are composed of twenty-four hours of equal length, but the canonical day, which lasts as long as the sunlight, varies according to the season. At the summer solstice it is longest, and it is shortest at the winter solstice. As it is necessary that it should contain twelve hours, these hours are "great" in the summer and "small" in the winter.

#### 16. ASTROLOGY

In the Middle Ages, and for Dante, astronomy and astrology were two aspects of the same science, and are described in this treatise by the single term *astrologia*. The celestial bodies were believed to have a great influence over sublunary things, and there was some foundation for this belief. The life-giving and life-sustaining power of the sun, and the relation between moon and tide are undeniable examples of the action of the heavenly bodies on the earth. But Dante and his contemporaries attributed effects of varied character not only to the sun and moon, but to the

earth's sister-planets and the fixed stars. Dante does not state definitely, but he certainly seems to imply in the second book of the "Convivio," that aptitude for particular sciences results from the influence of special planets possessing similar characteristics. Sonnet XXVIII distinctly affirms that this is the case.

In "Convivio," iii, 12, Dante states that the sun "vivifies all things with its heat," and it is apparently for this reason that he declares in the "De Monarchia" (i, 9) that man *and the sun* beget man, and that he calls that luminary in "Paradiso," xxii, 116, "father of all mortal life." It must not be forgotten, however, that in the tenth canto of that *cantica* (ll. 28-9) he speaks of the sun as

The greatest of the ministers of nature,  
Who with the power of heaven the world imprints.

Here he obviously refers to the sun as an agent in producing excellence and diversity, and as one of several or many agents. If we turn again to the "De Monarchia" (ii, 2) we shall find that Dante regards "nature" as a vague, popular term convertible with "heaven." Heaven is God's instrument in creation, and in the same passage in which Dante describes man as partly begotten by the sun, he calls him a son of heaven, which he depicts as remarkable for the harmony of its motions, and invites mankind to emulate. While, then, the sun may be esteemed the greatest of Nature's ministers, the other heavenly bodies have a share in determining human destiny. We have observed evidence of this belief in § xxx of the "Vita

Nuova," and Dante, having been born when the sun was in Gemini, attached the highest importance to this constellation, with reference to which he exclaims :

O glorious stars, O light impregnated  
 With mighty virtue, from which I acknowledge  
 All of my genius, whatsoe'er it be,  
 With you was born, and hid himself with you  
 He who is father of all human life,  
 When first I tasted of the Tuscan air.

To you devoutly at this hour my soul  
 Is sighing that it virtue may acquire  
 For the stern pass that draws it to itself.<sup>1</sup>

How was the virtue transmitted? This is explained in "Convivio," ii, 7, where we are informed that, although it resides in the whole of a heaven, it can only be conveyed from the star by means of its beams. This is not an automatic process, but results from the action of the Intelligence; and the Intelligence that guided the eighth heaven (that of the Fixed Stars) is represented as presiding over the economy of all the inferior spheres.

Within the heaven of the divine repose  
 Revolves a body, in whose virtue lies  
 The being of whatever it contains.  
 The following heaven, which has so many eyes,  
 Divides this being by essences diverse,  
 Distinguished from it, and by it contained.  
 The other spheres, by various differences,  
 All the distinctions, which they have within them,  
 Dispose unto their ends and their effects.

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<sup>1</sup> "Par." xxii, 112-23.

Thus do these organs of the world proceed,  
As thou perceivest now, from grade to grade;  
Since from above they take, and act beneath.  
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The power and motion of the holy spheres,  
As from the artisan the hammer's craft,  
Forth from the blessed motors must proceed.  
The heaven, which lights so manifold make fair,  
From the Intelligence profound, which turns it,  
The image takes, and makes of it a seal.  
And even as the soul within your dust,  
Through members different and accommodated  
To faculties diverse, expands itself.  
So likewise this Intelligence diffuses  
Its virtue multiplied among the stars,  
Itself revolving on its unity.  
Virtue diverse doth a diverse alloyage  
Make with the precious body that it quickens,  
In which, as life in you, it is combined.  
From the glad nature, whence it is derived,  
The mingled virtue through the body shines,  
Even as gladness through the living pupil.<sup>1</sup>

## 17. NOBILITY

The term "virtue" is used in this context in the most general sense of efficacy. In the fourth book Dante discusses and compares moral virtue and nobility. A large part of the book is devoted to disproving the authority of the Emperor Frederick II to define nobility, and the accuracy of his definition. He made it to consist of "ancient riches and good manners." This account evidently refers to the conven-

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<sup>1</sup> "Par." ii. 112-44.

tional meaning of the word, and Dante, as we have seen, accepts it in the "De Monarchia," and makes it the basis of his argument. The contradiction between the two treatises is fundamental. In the "Convivio" Dante inquires how lucre, which is itself filthy, can possibly confer nobility. In the "De Monarchia" the justice of the Prince depends on the absence of temptations arising from material wants, and it might be urged with considerable force that all persons whose possessions elevate them above the daily struggle for existence are exempt from many inducements to mean and criminal actions. Here, however, Dante does what he carefully abstains from doing in the "De Monarchia"—he appeals to facts. There are palpable and notorious instances of degeneracy, which may sometimes affect an entire kindred. "Ancient riches," therefore, are no guarantee of nobility, and good manners form but a small fraction of it.

What, then, is nobility? In the widest sense Dante defines it as "the perfection of its own nature in each thing." As regards man, it is essentially a quality of the soul, and may be reproduced in his offspring or not, according to circumstances. In Chapter XXI Dante describes the process of generation, in relation to the soul, in a way that renders it quite clear why nobility is not always or perhaps often transmitted. Paternity is merely one factor; there is the question of the disposition of the heaven, and the constellations are continually changing. Moreover, though the formative virtue of the begetting soul may be good, the "complexion" or constitution of the seed may be faulty;



and the Possible Intellect is bestowed by God in a measure proportionate to the excellence of the soul produced by the co-operation of these three "virtues." The Possible Intellect is the faculty of receiving general ideas, while the Active Intellect is the faculty that culls abstract ideas from sensible objects.

The human soul is composed of three elements, or, as Dante calls them, "potencies"—the vegetative, which it shares with plants; the sensitive, which it shares with brutes; and the intellectual, which it shares with the Deity and the angels ("Convivio," iii, 2; *cf.* "De Monarchia," i, 3). These faculties are developed not simultaneously, but in succession. The various stages are denoted in an important passage of the twenty-fifth canto of the "Purgatorio,"<sup>1</sup> in which Statius enlightens the younger poet:

The active virtue, being made a soul  
 As of a plant (in so far different  
 This on its way is, that arrived already)  
 Then works so much that now it moves and feels  
 Like a sea-fungus, and then undertakes  
 To organize the powers whose seed it is.  
 Now, son, dilates and now distends itself  
 The virtue from the generator's heart,  
 Where nature is intent on all its members.  
 But how from animal it man becomes  
 Thou dost not see as yet.

Open thy breast unto the truth that's coming  
 And know that, just as soon as in the foetus  
 The articulation of the brain is perfect,

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<sup>1</sup> ll. 36-78.

The Primal Motor turns to it well-pleased  
At so great art of nature, and inspires  
A spirit new with virtue all replete  
Which what it finds there active doth attract  
Into its substance, and becomes one soul,  
Which lives, and feels, and on itself revolves.  
And that thou less may wonder at my word,  
Behold the Sun's heat, which becometh wine  
Joined to the juice that from the vine distils.

Dante's mentor goes on to show how the soul in its entirety, not only the Possible Intellect, survives the death of the body and clothes itself anew by means of its inherent virtue. This reminds us of a passage of extreme interest in the second book of the "*Convivio*,"<sup>1</sup> in which Dante condemns in unmeasured terms the heretical denial of the immortality of the soul. The digression is interesting partly on account of Dante's friendship with Guido Cavalcanti, and partly on account of the widespread but seemingly unfounded notion that the poet himself at one period of his life substituted the light of philosophy for the lamp of faith, the "*Convivio*" being a monument of this falling away. The plain truth is that nothing in the work is more evident than Dante's consistent anxiety to confine his speculations within the limits of the Catholic religion; and, apart from small discrepancies, the "*Convivio*" is in striking harmony with the "*Commedia*," the orthodoxy of which is not only conceded, but insisted on.

As so much more goes to the making of a man than the character of his father, it is now easily understood

<sup>1</sup> Ch. ix.

why nobility is not an appanage of a particular family or class. Even when it is inherited, it may be lost. Every soul is endued with appetite, which in itself is neither good nor bad. Dante calls appetite a "spiritual motion,"<sup>1</sup> and it is good or bad according to the way it is trained and the objects to which it is attracted ("Purgatorio," xvi, 82-105; cp. "Purgatorio," xxx, 111-120). Appetite is identical with the philosophical conception of love, and in the "Convivio" (iv, 22, 26), it is represented mainly in a favourable light as a moral and spiritual lever. It may be just the reverse, and is so displayed in the seventeenth canto of the "Purgatorio":<sup>2</sup>

“Neither Creator nor a creature ever,  
 Son,” he began, “was destitute of love,  
 Natural or spiritual, and thou knowest it.  
 The natural was ever without error;  
 But err the other may by evil object,  
 Or by too much, or by too little vigour.  
 While in the first it well directed is  
 And in the second moderates itself,  
 It cannot be the cause of sinful pleasure.  
 But when to ill it turns, and with more care  
 Or lesser than it ought, runs after good,  
 ’Gainst the Creator works his own creation.  
 Hence thou mayst comprehend that love must be  
 The seed within yourselves of every virtue,  
 And every act that merits punishment.

There are who by abasement of their neighbour  
 Hope to excel and therefore only long  
 That from his greatness he may be cast down;

<sup>1</sup> “Purg.” xviii, 32.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 91-138.

There are, who power, grace, honour, and renown  
 Fear they may lose because another rises,  
 Thence are so sad that the reverse they love;  
 And there are those whom injury seems to chafe,  
 So that it makes them greedy for revenge,  
 And such must needs shape out another's harm.  
 This threefold love is wept for down below, etc.

In the succeeding canto Dante asserts the principle of free-will as a check upon appetite:

Innate within you is the power that counsels  
 And it should keep the threshold of assent.  
 This is the principle from which is taken  
 Occasion of desert in you, according  
 As good and guilty loves it takes and winnows.  
 Those who, in reasoning, to the bottom went,  
 Were of this innate liberty aware,  
 Therefore bequeathed they ethics to the world.  
 Supposing, then, that from necessity,  
 Springs every love that is within you kindled,  
 Within yourselves the power is to restrain it.  
 The noble virtue Beatrice understands  
 By the free will.<sup>1</sup>

All this is in complete accord with Dante's comparison of appetite to a spirited horse ridden by Reason,<sup>2</sup> and his definition of moral virtue as resulting from a "good and habitual choice"<sup>3</sup> and as a mean between two extremes.<sup>4</sup> Nobility and moral virtue are not co-extensive,<sup>5</sup> since the former includes intellectual and moral virtues; good dispositions, such as piety and religion; praiseworthy feelings, like

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xviii, 62-74.

<sup>2</sup> "Conv." iv, 26.

<sup>3</sup> "Conv." iv, 18.

<sup>4</sup> "Conv." iv, 17.

<sup>5</sup> "Conv." iv, 18.

modesty and pity; and even physical excellences—beauty, and strength, and health. Of the intellectual virtues Dante says nothing in Book IV, but he refers to them in the second chapter of Book III, where he speaks of scientific, reasoning or counselling, inventive, and judicial faculties. In "Convivio," iv, 21, he mentions seven spiritual virtues, or gifts of the Holy Ghost, in regard to which he follows Isaiah, xi, 2. The moral virtues, eleven in number, are distinguished in accordance with the "Ethics" of Aristotle; but Dante's comments are confined to the qualities mentioned in the canzone as befitting the different periods of human life. These are, mainly, obedience, modesty, sweetness, and regard for personal appearance in youth (1-25); self-restraint, courage, affection, courtesy, and loyalty in maturity (25-45); prudence, justice, liberality, and affability in one's declining years (45-60); and piety and gratitude in extreme old age (60-70).

It may be noted that in the twentieth chapter of Book IV Guinicelli's ode, "*Al cor gentil ripara sempre Amore*," is mentioned, and the whole of the book may be regarded as an elaborate defence of a cardinal doctrine of the philosophic school of poetry to which Dante adhered—that nobility is moral and intellectual, not a synonym for high birth and social distinction, though, in Chapter XX, we find it hinted that the poor man is at some disadvantage in attaining it.

The "Convivio" cannot be termed a systematic treatise, and yet it has a certain method and com-

pleteness, since it begins with a study of the heavenly bodies, traces their influence on human beings, and concludes with a view of man in society reflecting their harmony. In the fourteenth book he intended to treat of justice, and in the fifteenth, and last, of generosity, probably in connection with Canzoni XX and X.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." i, 12; 8.

PART II  
SPIRITUAL





## CHAPTER I

### THE "COMMEDIA"—MECHANISM

THE whole of the preceding chapters are, in a true sense, a preparation for the study of the "Commedia," since the romantic, political, and philosophical ideas they unfold lie at the root of that great poem, while it would be obviously impossible to comprehend its significance with regard to Dante's personal history as recounted at the outset. Already, therefore, we are in possession of many of the facts and principles essential to an intelligent perusal of the "Commedia"; but there still remain various topics in relation to the work which can by no means be overlooked.

#### I. DATE

First as to the date. We must distinguish between the date of the vision, real or imaginary, on which the poem is founded, and that of the poem itself. The early commentators failed to observe this distinction, and believed that the "Commedia" was written in 1300. As a number of passages display knowledge of events considerably later, this was to attribute to Dante, over and above his other talents, a

gift of actual prophecy, to which he certainly pretends, and which at least one critic<sup>1</sup> seems willing to allow. Common sense and ordinary experience do not permit us to build on this very shaky hypothesis, and when we find Dante alluding to incidents that befell ten or fifteen years after the nominal date of the poem, we take the liberty to conclude that the passages in which these allusions occur were indited with the pen not of a prophet but an historian.

Could we be sure that each canto was completed in its present form in its present order, such references would be of inestimable value in marking the progress of the composition; but it is not likely that the "*Commedia*," as the masterpiece upon which Dante hung all his expectations of undying fame, would be finished, as it were, piecemeal. Foscolo unquestionably erred in conjecturing that Dante jealously preserved, as a profound secret, the nature of the work on which he was engaged, so that its contents became known only after his death; but there is little doubt that, as Witte says, the poem was revised and interpolated again and again before it was published. Thus when Dante, in the nineteenth canto of the "*Inferno*,"<sup>2</sup> betrays an acquaintance with the time of Pope Clement's death, which took place on 20th April, 1314, the only safe conclusion that can be drawn from the circumstance is that the poem, as a whole, was not completed before that date.

As regards the "*Paradiso*," it was not completed, nor even perhaps begun, before 1318, since in his first

<sup>1</sup> Repetti.

<sup>2</sup> l. 79.

epistle Giovanni di Virgilio refers to the expedition of King Robert of Naples to Genoa, which occurred in the summer of that year, and Dante observes in his reply that it will be time enough to bind his head with ivy and laurel "when the revolving bodies of the universe and the dwellers in the stars shall, like the lower kingdoms, be revealed in my song."

The parturition, then, was slow and gradual, and though there is reason to surmise that the poem assumed its final shape between the death of Henry VII in 1313 and Dante's own death in 1321, it is not impossible that he had been experimenting with the subject from the year 1300 or thereabouts.

## 2. FICTITIOUS DATE

If, as a fact, he then made the first sketch of the "Commedia," it is abundantly clear why he referred its action to that year. If he began it thus early, he may also have continued it, and therefore, after all, Frate Ilario's letter may be genuine and truthful. Scartazzini's main argument against this notion is that the "Commedia" cannot have been in any sense contemporary with the "Convivio," because that would be fatal to Witte's theory of a psychological "trilogy." But the theory is, as we have seen, most questionable—it cannot be received as an article of faith that Dante passed through a period of philosophic doubt between a child-like acceptance of Christianity mirrored in the "Vita Nuova," and the triumphant assurance proclaimed in the "Commedia."

If the "Commedia" was not begun in 1300, what motive, or motives, can have led Dante to settle upon this date as the time of the action? It is possible that he had some dream or vision more or less analogous to the broad outlines of the poem, or that he conceived the general plan and thought out some of the details. It is possible, and even probable, that he underwent the spiritual experience known as conversion, and formed the resolution of dedicating his genius thenceforth to the service of religion. It has been frequently pointed out that 1300 was not only the centennial year, but the year of the great Jubilee, and singly or jointly these circumstances might well have inspired some vast and profound poetical project. Then, again, this year was the crown or turning-point of Dante's life. Born in 1265, he would then have been thirty-five—an age that coincided with half of man's allotted span. As Dante himself makes no allusion to the Jubilee, it is extremely doubtful whether that event took any great hold on his imagination. The commencement of the poem, however, is plainly significant.

Midway upon the journey of our life.

At the age of thirty-five, when at least half of life was gone, Dante may, quite naturally, have reflected on his destiny and that of the whole human race. But the fitness of such conduct is no proof that it was historical. In 1300 Dante was in the throes of political controversy, and one would suppose that his thoughts were absorbed by the difficult problems arising out of

the creation of a new and bitter feud. The overture of the "Commedia" may be no more than a recognition that repentance and reform are becoming to a man who has arrived at middle age. The date of the vision may be as fictitious as that of the poem. In this connection it is worthy of remark that Guittone of Arezzo, for whom Dante expresses such unbounded contempt, but with whose writings he was evidently familiar, was his precursor in this respect. Gaspari, in his notice of that poet, says:

"Guittone's literary activity is divided into two sharply distinguished periods. To the first belonged the love-poetry. Without love, he then thought, there is no excellence, no poetry; and so he endeavours to fall in love, entreating Amore to enter his breast, and begging the poet Bandino to teach him what he must do in order to fall in love (Sonnet LII). But there came a turning-point in his life, 'in the middle of the way,' as with Dante:

From my beginning until middle age  
I was in a place shameful, foul, and hideous,  
To which I turned me quite . . .

he says, in the poem on his conversion to the Virgin Mary (Canzone III). He was, therefore, probably only thirty-five years old at the time when he entered the order of the *Cavalieri di Sta. Maria*."

Still more important is the passage in the fourth book of the "Convivio" (c. 28), in which Dante

points out that Christ died in his thirty-fifth year, *il colmo della sua età*.

We cannot, then, take it for granted that there was an actual crisis in Dante's spiritual history at the time stated, and the fact that he afterwards succumbed to vain and amorous thoughts makes against the belief that there was any complete renunciation of the world, any radical and final change in his nature. He continued to waver between the delusive and transitory charms of earth and the beckonings of the blessed Beatrice. For the purpose of the poem, however, his conversion at the age of thirty-five must be assumed, and he represents it as effected by a miraculous vision, or rather, by a real pilgrimage through the regions of the other world procured for him, as a precious boon, by the tearful solicitation of her who had become, in very deed, his guardian angel.

Some time did I sustain him with my look ;  
Revealing unto him my youthful eyes,  
I led him with me turned in the right way.  
As soon as ever of my second age  
I was upon the threshold and changed life,  
Himself he took from me and gave to others.  
When from the flesh to spirit I ascended,  
And beauty and virtue were in me increased,  
I was to him less dear and less delightful ;  
And into ways untrue he turned his steps,  
Pursuing the false images of good  
That never any promises fulfil ;  
Nor prayer for inspiration me availed,  
By means of which in dreams and otherwise  
I called him back, so little did he heed them.  
So low he fell, that all appliances



For his salvation were already short,  
 Save showing him the people of perdition.  
 For this I visited the gates of death,  
 And unto him, who so far up has led him,  
 My intercessions were with weeping borne.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. SIGNIFICANCE

This explains the vision, but it does not fully explain the poem, the motives of which are wider. We have seen that in the "Convivio" (i, 2) Dante affirms the principle that a writer should eschew allusions to himself. There is no reason to suppose that he intended to confine this remark to that particular treatise as a philosophical work, since he calls the "Commedia" an *opus doctrinale*,<sup>2</sup> but he qualifies it by saying that a man may speak of himself in cases where "there ensues from it very great advantage to others by way of doctrine." Throughout the poem Dante writes in the first person, but the procedure is justified by the circumstance that he conceives of himself as a representative human being. In his letter to Can Grande he declares that, literally, the subject of the poem is the state of souls after death, but in an allegorical sense, "the subject is man, in so far as by merit or demerit he is liable to just punishment or reward." As the contents of Epistle X, which is concerned with different aspects of the composition, formal and philosophical, have been set forth in a previous section, there is no need to recapitulate the

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxx, 121-41.

<sup>2</sup> Epistle x, 6.

points one by one, but it may be as well to say that even those critics who are doubtful about its authenticity attach the utmost importance to the document as a key to the mind of the poet, and therefore the reader will find it expedient to refer to those pages in which the letter is analyzed.

The "Commedia" is a superb literary performance, but Dante would have esteemed it blasphemy if he had treated it merely as an occasion for the display of his poetical genius and philosophical acquirements. In the epistle to Can Grande he distinctly states that the work is a "moral affair"; and by avowing that "the subject is man in so far as by merit or demerit he is liable to just punishment or reward," he intends that the "Commedia" is a revelation, not simply of the Hell, Purgatory, or Paradise that awaits the soul on its departure from the body, but of certain analogous conditions of the soul in its probationary state, which render its ultimate destiny inevitable and according to right. There is a *moral* Hell, a *moral* Purgatory, and a *moral* Paradise, which some of the early commentators distinguish from the *essential*. Holding the mirror up to his fellow-creatures in the shape of examples, Dante laboured for their reclamation.

#### 4. GENUS

Dante names his poem a *commedia* ("Inferno," xvi, 128; xxi, 2), the accent falling on the penultimate syllable. In the "Paradiso" he calls it, with reference probably to the matter of which he there treats, "the

consecrated" or "the sacred poem" ("Paradiso," xxiii, 62; xxv, 1)—a phrase that confirms our observation that he thought of the work as something that rose far above the level of mere art, and was akin to the prophetic writings of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse of the New. We have marked the senses in which he understood the term "comedy"; and we may here add that in "Inferno," xx, 113, Virgil is made to speak of "my high tragedy." It might thus be inferred that Dante did not regard his "Commedia" as pertaining to the same class as the "Aeneid."

It is doubtful whether this conclusion would be warranted. In the opening canto he praises his own "beautiful style," which, he says, does him honour, and he tells us that he took it from Virgil. Three of the five bards—Homer, Virgil, and Lucan—with whom he claims fellowship in the fourth canto, were epic writers. Ovid's "Metamorphoses" is epic in metre, and, in so far as it is a narrative poem, in form.<sup>1</sup> Horace, Dante frankly recognizes as a satirist. He is, therefore, an exception, but an exception that does not much signify. The "Commedia" includes many passages of pungent satire, but essentially, it is an epic. The invocations of Apollo and the Muses, together with the many incidental similes and metaphors, the sustained loftiness of the tone, the greatness of the theme, and the very bulk of the poem, afford clear indication of the category in which Dante would

<sup>1</sup> The "Ovidio Maggiore" and Lucan are mentioned together in "Conv." iii, 3.

have placed it, modestly as he chose to designate it a comedy.

Nor must we be misled by what is said in the epistle to Can Grande concerning the style. Dante rather confuses style and diction. The two cannot be considered entirely distinct, but whatever freedom Dante may allow himself in the occasional and discriminating use of certain terms, the beautiful style, of which he speaks,<sup>1</sup> was by no means sacrificed in the "Commedia." On the contrary, it is there seen in its perfection, and Dante, as a conscious artist, must have been aware of it. It is not improbable, indeed, that the proem, like other prefaces, was indited when the work was either finished or well advanced towards completion, in which case the *bello stile* was, primarily, that of the "Commedia" itself, not that of the *canzoni*, which, as tragic compositions, were technically of a higher order.

The "Commedia" is epic, with a difference. A pure epic is a poem of action, not a didactic work, and Dante's masterpiece is confessedly didactic. The "Paradiso" is more—it is scholastic. This, however, does not do away with the fact that the poem moves through a gradation of vivid scenes to a final and glorious climax, and that the illuminating dialogues, though they impede the progress of the work and may be censured as too frequent and diffuse, are as necessary to its evolution as the speeches interspersed in the "Iliad" or the "Aeneid."

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." i, 87.

## 5. STRUCTURE

The metre of the "Commedia" has been discussed in connection with the prosodical portion of the "De Vulgari Eloquentia." As regards the structure of the poem, it is remarkable for its symmetry. It consists of three *cantiche*—Dante's own word ("Purgatorio," xxxiii, 140)<sup>1</sup>—and these contain altogether one hundred cantos. Canto is Dante's description ("Inferno," xx, 2; "Paradiso," v, 16, 139), but the earliest commentators preferred the term *capitolo*, which Dante applies to the chapters of his prose works (*e.g.*, "Convivio," ii, 7). This circumstance may show that it was the philosophical or historical content, rather than the poetical form, that chiefly interested them. The "Inferno" comprises thirty-four cantos, and each of the other *cantiche* thirty-three, thus completing the century. The allocation of an extra canto to the first of the three divisions, instead of disturbing the balance of the parts, rather emphasizes it, since the opening canto is really a proem,<sup>2</sup> and in that sense belongs to all three parts, and especially to the first two, throughout which Virgil remains Dante's counsellor and guide. Still it would seem as if Dante considered it as falling to the "Inferno" in the general scheme, and, reckoning it so, it is extraordinary how nearly the three *cantiche* correspond in point of length.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Epistle x, 12.

<sup>2</sup> This is shown by the position of the invocation in Canto ii; in the other *cantiche* the invocation occurs in the first canto.

The total number of lines is 14,233. Of these the "Inferno" has 4,720, the "Purgatorio" 4,755, and the "Paradiso" 4,758. The majority of the cantos range between 136 and 151 lines. One has 124, four have 130, four 133, thirteen 136, sixteen 139, thirteen 145, thirteen 148, nine 151, seven 154, one 157. The shortest cantos are VI and XI of the "Inferno," and the longest XXXII of the "Purgatorio." The inequality of the component cantos renders more surprising the substantial equality of the *cantiche*, which appears to have been accidental. Clearly, however, it was not an accident that determined the number and distribution of the cantos. Dante may have been thinking of

The song of those who sing for ever  
After the music of the eternal spheres.<sup>1</sup>

There were ten spheres, and the cantos or songs of the "Commedia" are ten multiplied by itself, just as Beatrice's mysterious nine is three multiplied by itself. Combined with this we have the division of the poem into three *cantiche*, and of each *cantica* into thirty-three (or  $33 + 1$ ) cantos—that is, three and three multiplied by the perfect number. In this arrangement of the poem—"the sacred poem"—Dante symbolized the Trinity, and probably much besides (*cf.* "Vita Nuova," § xxx). It is not improbable that ninety-nine of the cantos represent the nine mobile heavens, while the opening canto signifies the earth or the subject around which they revolve ("Convivio,"

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxx, 92-3.

ii, 14); or, as he accounted nine a miracle, and Beatrice was a nine, this may have been the guiding principle, a proem being always supposed. Quite possibly all these ideas were present to his mind in the same way as he conceived of a fourfold interpretation of the *canzoni* and "Commedia," and a twofold explanation of the number nine in relation to Beatrice.

## 6. SOURCES

The "Commedia" is distinctively a Christian poem—it is the epic of Christendom; and therefore we naturally look for the principal fount of inspiration in the Bible, which Dante certainly did not neglect, but to which, as certainly, he did not confine himself. Various mediaeval legends, with which he may or may not have been familiar, have been adduced as possible sources of the poem, but the only precedents for a visitation of the invisible world by a mortal man in bodily form, as far as Dante seems to have been aware, were two, and these are stated quite plainly in the second canto of the "Inferno."<sup>1</sup>

Poet, who guidest me,  
 Regard my manhood, if it be sufficient  
 Ere to the arduous pass thou dost confide me.  
 Thou sayest, that of Sylvius the parent,  
 While yet corruptible, unto the world  
 Immortal went, and was there bodily.  
 But if the adversary of all evil  
 Was courteous, thinking of the high effect  
 That issue would from him, and who, and what,

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<sup>1</sup> ll. 10-32.



To men of intellect unmeet it seems not;  
 For he was of great Rome, and of her empire  
 In the empyreal heaven as father chosen;  
 The which and what, wishing to speak the truth,  
 Were 'stablished as the holy place, wherein  
 Sits the successor of the greatest Peter.  
 Upon this journey, whence thou givest him vaunt,  
 Things did he hear, which the occasion were  
 Both of his victory and the papal mantle.  
 Thither went afterwards the Chosen Vessel,  
 To bring back comfort thence unto that Faith,  
 Which of salvation's way is the beginning.  
 But I, why thither come, or who concedes it?  
 I not Æneas am, I am not Paul,  
 Nor I, nor others, think me worthy of it.

Thus we learn that one of Dante's sources was the sixth book of the "Aeneid." Another was St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians,<sup>1</sup> in which we find the following passage:

"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

"And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

"How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. . . .

"And lest I should be exalted above measure

<sup>1</sup> xii, 1-7.

through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me."

Dante must have known this testimony, being undoubtedly well versed in St. Paul's writings, from which he quotes repeatedly in the "Convivio" and elsewhere. It is fairly certain, however, that it is not this passage that was most prominently in his mind in alluding to St. Paul's journey to the abodes of disembodied spirits. We have to remember that Dante was on the eve of visiting the nether regions in the company of Virgil, who was disqualified from conducting to and through Paradise, to which St. Paul says he was caught up. It will be recollected also that the prime object of Dante's pilgrimage was his conversion, which was to be achieved by "showing him the people of perdition." Naturally, therefore, we should expect that this journey of St. Paul would be, like that of Dante, to the infernal rather than the celestial kingdoms.

Now there was a well-known and widely circulated legend in which St. Paul is depicted as traversing Hell under the guidance of the Archangel Michael. Together they witness the torments of the damned, and it is largely through their intercessions that the lost souls are granted a respite from their sufferings from the ninth hour on Saturday to the first on Monday.

There existed several Latin versions of this legend, which have been handed down in no fewer than fifty-four manuscripts. The "Vision" was translated into

German, French, English, Danish, and Provençal, and if Dante did not make its acquaintance in one of the Latin versions—there were said to be two Greek originals, one of which we have—it is quite probable that he came to know of it through a Provençal translation, which is reproduced in Chaytor's "*Troubadours of Dante*."<sup>1</sup> The resemblance between St. Paul's mythical descent into Hell with the Archangel Michael and Dante's visit, under the conduct of Virgil, is obvious at a glance.

There were other mediaeval legends of a like character, such as the Vision of Frate Alberico, the Vision of Walkelin, and the Voyage of St. Brandan; and it is possible that Dante may have been acquainted with some of them. Most likely, also, he had beheld mystery plays like that at which Jacopone's young bride perished in her gaiety and loveliness. There were doom-pictures and carven screens on which he may have gazed, and Advent and Lenten sermons to which he may have hearkened. All these sights and sounds were hints and reminders of human responsibility and tribulation. In the terrible uncertainty of life in the Middle Ages, exceeding its constant and necessary uncertainty, the question of the future state loomed forth from a background of despair.

Eternity was in the air far more than is the case now, when the mightiest efforts of the intellect are directed to the conquest of nature for the multiplication of material appliances. Dante had barely attained middle age when a sense of the vanity of things struck with

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 1-4.

full force his tender imagination, and at the same time he realized that much, if not most, of the misery afflicting mankind was due to gratuitous folly and sin. Through the dense gloom of his spiritual night glimmered, like a taper in a Catholic sanctuary, bidding men "watch and pray," the memory of the dead Beatrice, and that memory, revived and gradually transfigured by ceaseless meditation into a dazzling vision of hope and blessedness, formed a precious contrast to the darkness and blankness of all around. The grim figures of War and Pestilence might stalk in the streets and fields, and Cruelty sit entrenched in the hearts of men; but the balm and solace he had invented for himself nothing could take from him. The "Commedia" owed something to literary precedent, something to the tone and temper, the ideas and circumstances of the age; but more to individual experience, whence came the "virtue," or motive power, that set Dante's latent powers in action. We may put it in this way. To Dante the Florence of his unruly affections and implacable enemies—not the beloved ideal Florence—was hell; his mean and lonely wanderings were purgatory; and the peaceful atmosphere of his last refuge, paradise. "The kingdom of heaven is within you," and it was only perhaps in his last days that he possessed the repose of mind and detachment from worldly interests that enabled him to describe with so much ardour and sincerity the serene joys of the contemplative life, which, like his Divine Master, he had pronounced more than once "the better part."

It is necessary to distinguish between the spiritual and material sources of the "Commedia," or, to adopt the philosophical terminology of the "Convivio,"<sup>1</sup> its efficient and material causes. Although in many cases they must have been coincident, there is evidently a difference in principle between the forces that generated the poem and the matter of which it is composed. The contents of the "Commedia" are extremely multifarious. Dante poured into it, as into a vast melting-pot, his accumulated stores of learning, whether acquired from books, from observation, or from converse with his fellow-men. It is an inventory, not only of the writer's mental furniture, but of mediaeval accomplishment. And here we realize the advantage of a careful study of Dante's minor works. From the "Epistles," the "Vita Nuova," the "Canzoniere," the "De Vulgari Eloquentia," the "De Monarchia," and the "Convivio," rays converge and blend as in a prism; and in reading the "Commedia" we seem, in a sense, to be treading familiar ground. Old facts, old notions re-appear, but set as gems in a new and luculent context. Not, of course, that the whole of the "Commedia" exists as ore in the poems and treatises of former years; nor that Dante's writings are everywhere perfectly consistent, but in indicating the origins and ingredients of his lesser compositions, we have practically anticipated the bibliography of the "Commedia." The list of authorities includes the Holy Scriptures, the Latin Fathers, classic Roman literature, Boethius and Orosius, mediaeval translations of

<sup>1</sup> iv, 20.

Aristotle, the translation of the treatise on the Celestial Hierarchy, ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, the works of St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and Richard of St. Victor, the verse and prose writings of the Troubadours, North French romances, the oral instruction of Brunetto Latini, and oral traditions.

## 7. COSMOGRAPHY

One subject that must be considered anew in connection with the "Commedia" is Dante's cosmography. There is no need to say more on his astronomical system so fully expounded in the "Convivio," but neither in that treatise nor in any other did it fall to his lot to bestow equal attention on geography, while the situations and physical features of Hell and Purgatory, unlike those of Paradise, remained quite untouched by his speculations. Just as in the "Aeneid," so in the "Commedia," Hell and Purgatory—Virgil has a dim notion of Purgatory—are placed in the confines of the earth, and we are left in no uncertainty as to their whereabouts.

First, as to the earth in general. Although Dante nowhere supplies a regular description of the globe, it is clear from various passages that the omission was not caused by a want of definite conceptions on the subject. We know from the "De Aqua et Terra" that he considered the figure of the earth a perfect sphere, not elliptical like that of the moon,<sup>1</sup> and the surface as consisting of land and water in unequal

<sup>1</sup> § xix.

proportions, the latter greatly preponderating. The habitable portion, or such of the land as rises above the sea, he computed to extend 180 degrees, or half the total longitude, from the mouths of the Ganges, the eastern limit, to Gades (Cadiz), where the Pillars of Hercules had marked the western bound. It comprised 67 degrees of latitude, reckoned not from the Equator, but from Lat.  $12^{\circ} 45' N$ . This, it may be observed, was the teaching of Alfraganus.

Both the North and the South Pole are stated in the "Convivio" (iii, 5) to be covered by the ocean, and Dante must have imagined that Africa was bounded on the south by the ocean at  $12^{\circ} 45' N$ . of the Equator, which would tally with his description of the habitable earth in the "De Aqua et Terra" as a crescent. In the "De Monarchia" (i, 14) Dante speaks of the Scythians as living beyond the seventh *clima*, which corresponds with our term *zone*, and from which we get our word climate. Alfraganus divides the habitable earth into seven, *climata*, the first, or that which is nearest the Equator, being occupied by the Garamantes,<sup>1</sup> whom Virgil names with the Indi as the uttermost of the nations ("Aeneid," vi, 794). In the "Paradiso" (xxvii, 80-1) Dante refers to himself as traversing "from midst to end" the whole arc formed by the first *clima*—a statement which demands a word of explanation.

Among other Latin writings Dante was acquainted with Cicero's "Somnium Scipionis" (in the sixth book of the "De Republica"), as is shown not only by the

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." iii, 5.†



correspondence of the planetary system expounded in it—as far as it extends—with Dante's scheme in the "Convivio" and "Commedia," but by the fact that he borrows from it the idea of surveying the contemptible "threshing-floor," the earth, from the altitude of the stars. His first look is recorded in "Paradiso," xxii, 135; 151-2. In "Paradiso," xxvii, 75-85, is mentioned a second look, when he "saw the mad track of Ulysses past Gades." This is an allusion to the last voyage of the old Greek recounted in the twenty-sixth canto of the "Inferno."<sup>1</sup> The story is not to be found in the "Odyssey," and, as no original has been traced, it is supposed to have been invented by Dante. Upon it is based Tennyson's well-known poem "Ulysses." The adventure is one of the very few episodes, or interludes, of the "Commedia," related with some measure of completeness, and the narrator is the hero himself:

When I

From Circe had departed, who concealed me  
 More than a year there near unto Gaëta,  
 Or ever yet Æneas named it so,  
 Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence  
 For my old father, nor the due affection  
 Which joyous should have made Penelope,  
 Could overcome within me the desire  
 I had to be experienced of the world,  
 And of the vice and virtue of mankind.  
 But I put forth upon the open sea,  
 With one sole ship and that small company  
 By which I never had deserted been.

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<sup>1</sup> ll. 90-142.

Both of the shores I saw as far as Spain,  
Far as Morocco and the isle of Sardes,  
And the others which that sea bathes round about.  
I and my company were old and slow,  
When at that narrow passage we arrived,  
Where Hercules his landmarks set as signals,  
That man no farther onward should adventure.  
On the right hand behind me left I Seville,  
And on the other already had left Ceuta.  
"O brothers, who amid a hundred thousand  
Perils," I said, "have come unto the West,  
To this so inconsiderable vigil  
Which is remaining of your senses still,  
Be ye unwilling to deny the knowledge,  
Following the sun, of the unpeopled world?  
Consider ye the seed from which ye sprang;  
Ye were not made to live like unto brutes,  
But for pursuit of virtue and of knowledge."  
So eager did I render my companions,  
With this brief exhortation, for the voyage,  
That then I hardly could have held them back.  
And having turned our stern unto the morning,  
We of the oars made wings for our mad flight,  
Evermore gaining on the larboard side.  
Already all the stars of the other pole<sup>1</sup>  
The night beheld, and ours so very low  
It did not rise above the ocean floor.  
Five times rekindled, and as many quenched  
Had been the splendour underneath the moon,  
Since we had entered into the deep pass,  
When there appeared to us a mountain, dim  
From distance, and it seemed to me so high  
As I had never any one beheld.  
Joyful were we, and soon it turned to weeping;  
For out of the new land a whirlwind rose,  
And smote upon the forepart of the ship.

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<sup>1</sup> Our pole or sky, with its stars.

Three times it made her whirl with all the waters,  
 At the fourth time it made the stern uplift,  
 And the prow downward go, as pleased Another,  
 Until the sea above us closed again.

It is evident from this account that Ulysses had reached the southern Pacific Ocean, and it is intended that we should believe that "he was the first that ever burst into that silent sea." And the mountain? To all appearance<sup>1</sup> it was the Mount of Purgatory, with whose position at the antipodes of Jerusalem it may be considered to accord. According to Dante, Jerusalem was the centre of the habitable earth—a notion apparently derived from Ezechiel, v, 5: "This is Jerusalem: I have set her in the midst of the nations, and countries are round about her." At the commencement of Canto II of the "Purgatorio" Dante thus conveys to us that it was dawn at the Mount of Purgatory:

Already had the sun the horizon reached  
 Whose circle of meridian covers o'er  
 Jerusalem with its most lofty point,  
 And night that opposite to him revolves  
 Was issuing forth from Ganges with the Scales,  
 That fall from out her hand when she exceedeth;  
 So that the white and the vermilion cheeks  
 Of beautiful Aurora, where I was,  
 By too great age were changing into orange.<sup>2</sup>

By the horizon is meant the western horizon, *i.e.*, the sun was setting at Jerusalem; and therefore it was

<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of its height, see "Purg." xxviii, 96-102.

<sup>2</sup> "Purg." ii, 1-9.

midnight at the Ganges, which was distant from Jerusalem one-fourth of the circumference of the earth, and mid-day at Gades, which was equally distant in the opposite direction, and half-way between Jerusalem and the Mount of Purgatory. Consequently, when the sun, travelling from east to west, was at its zenith at Gades, it was beginning to rise at the Mount of Purgatory, which had a common horizon with Jerusalem—that in which Gades lay.

We have now ascertained the position of Purgatory. The next point to be determined is the situation of Hell, and regarding that we have plain information in the last canto of the "Inferno," where Virgil resolves Dante's perplexity, as they are on the eve of emerging from its gloomy depths:

Thou still imaginest  
Thou art beyond the centre, where I grasped  
The hair of the fell worm who mines the world.  
That side thou wast, so long as I descended;  
When round I turned me, thou didst pass the point  
To which things heavy draw from every side,  
And now beneath the hemisphere art come  
Opposite that which overhangs the vast  
Dry land, and 'neath whose cope was put to death  
The Man who without sin was born and lived.  
Thou hast thy feet upon the little sphere  
Which makes the other face of the Judecca.  
Here it is morn when it is evening there;  
And he who with his hair a stairway made us  
Still fixed remaineth as he was before.  
Upon this side he fell down out of heaven;  
And all the land, that whilom here emerged,  
For fear of him made of the sea a veil,  
And came to our hemisphere; and peradventure

To flee from him, what on this side appears  
Left the place vacant here, and back recoiled.<sup>1</sup>

This passage shows that, according to Dante's conceptions, the earth underwent vast physical changes at the time of the fall of Lucifer. Prior to that the distribution of the dry land was more equal—there was a southern continent. When Satan, cast out of heaven, impinged head foremost on the surface of the earth opposite to Jerusalem, this continent disappeared and went to augment the aggregation of dry land in the northern hemisphere. On the same occasion the Mount of Purgatory was thrown up, being composed of the material displaced by the precipitation of the gigantic form of the arch-rebel through the interior of the earth as far as the centre. Dante poetically attributes these seismic revolutions to the *terror* of the earth which recoiled from contact with the accursed person of the Evil One. It was by the shaft sunk by "the fell worm who *mines* the world" that Dante arrived at the Mount of Purgatory, which thus communicated with the lowest depth of Hell. Hell itself lies in the northern hemisphere and underneath the crust of the habitable earth, of which, as we have seen, Jerusalem is the centre.

Where was the gate of Hell? There is, perhaps, no absolute need to assume that there was only one gate; but, as regards Dante, it is reasonable to suppose that he entered Hell from Italy, and, more particularly, from the ruins of ancient Cumae, where there

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xxxiv, 104-26.

was a vast subterranean grotto. This is suggested by the considerable likeness between the first canto of the "Inferno" and the commencement of Book VI of the "Aeneid," the forest of the former representing the *nemus* of the latter, and the mountain the *arces*. Aeneas descended into Hell by this route, and as Virgil, who recounts his journey, is Dante's guide, he would naturally conduct him by the same path, which, we cannot help thinking, was the common highway.

The general configuration of Dante's Hell, thanks to his precise and perspicuous treatment of details, is easily grasped. It is true that he does not lay himself out, in any single passage, to project a complete design, though he takes some trouble to specify particular features, where such explanation appears to him necessary. Broadly speaking, the topography is assumed, but, in marking the stages of his progress Dante intimates the nature and succession of different parts, and thus we are enabled to piece together an idea of the whole.

## 8. HELL: PHYSICAL FEATURES

Hell consists of nine concentric and diminishing circles surrounding an abyss, at the bottom of which is the upper half of Lucifer. It is impossible to improve on Boccaccio's comparison of a funnel (*corno*), and he is doubtless right in holding that the tiers or ledges are cavernous—that is, that they extend to a considerable distance under a natural canopy, "thus allowing for lake and marsh and wood, and the *vasta*

*campagna* of the arch-heretics" (Gaspari). Hell, therefore, has somewhat the form of a vast amphitheatre.

Dante does not state its dimensions, but its middle point is in a direct line with Jerusalem and the Mount of Purgatory, while its uppermost and widest circle appears to approach the earth's crust at Cumae, or, at any rate, somewhere in Italy. Now, according to Dante's computations in the "*Convivio*,"<sup>1</sup> Rome is about equidistant from the Equator and the North Pole, and the actual circumference of the earth at this latitude may be roughly taken at 17,000 miles. But according to Alfraganus, Dante's authority, the diameter of the earth is 6,500 miles, and on this supposition the uppermost circumference of Hell, under latitude 45°, would be roughly 14,000 miles, and its vertical depth to the centre of the earth, where Lucifer is, about 2,200.

On passing within the gate, Dante finds himself in an ante-Hell, the occupants of which are "the melancholy souls of those who lived withouten infamy or praise" commingled with the "caitiff choir" of angels, who had been neither rebellious nor faithful to God, but for self. The poet then reaches the bank of a great river—the Acheron, which divides the ante-Hell from Hell proper. In the same way the Styx is the partition between the fourth and fifth circle, while Phlegethon closes the seventh circle, and in the ninth or lowest circle is a frozen lake formed by the waters of Cocytus. These four rivers are really one and the

<sup>1</sup> iii, 5.



same, and are fed by the tears of humanity welling from the figure of an Old Man on the summit of Mount Ida in Crete.

A grand old man stands in the mount erect,  
Who holds his shoulders turn'd tow'rd's Damietta,  
And looks at Rome as if it were his mirror.  
His head is fashioned of refinéd gold,  
And of pure silver are the arms and breast;  
Then is he brass as far down as the fork.  
From that point downward all is chosen iron,  
Save that the right foot is of kiln-baked clay,  
And more he stands on that than on the other.  
Each part, except the gold, is by a fissure  
Asunder cleft, that dripping is with tears,  
Which gathered together, perforate that cavern.  
From rock to rock they fall into this valley,  
Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon they form;  
Then downward go along this narrow sluice  
Unto that point where is no more descending;  
They form Cocytus.<sup>1</sup>

Dante, having entered by the gate situated at the western extremity, proceeds from right to left. "The idea of descent," says Ruskin, "is in Dante's mind spiral (as of a worm's or serpent's coil) throughout; even to the mode of Geryon's flight, *ruota e discende*; and Minos accordingly indicates which circle any sinner is to be sent to, in a most graphically labyrinthine manner, by twisting his tail round himself so many times, necessarily thus marking the level" ("Fors Clavigera," Letter XXIII.)

There seems to be no doubt that the descent is spiral—at any rate, in the sense of the path connect-

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xiv, 103-19.

ing circle with circle being lateral, not vertical. What is not so clear is whether the circles themselves are spiral. The term *conca* (shell), which Dante applies to Hell in "Inferno," xi, 16, rather suggests a spiral cavity, but, on this assumption, the path would be continuous. Why then do we hear of a descent<sup>1</sup> when Dante passes from one circle to another, and that at a definite point, of which Virgil knows?<sup>2</sup> A demon keeps guard at the points of descent, just as an angel is warden at a Purgatorial stairway.

In passing from the sixth to the seventh circle, the travellers arrive at a precipice down which they take their way over loose stones, and Virgil mentions that the ravine had been formed since his previous visit to the nether hell—at the time of the Crucifixion. At the corresponding point in the seventh circle, Phlegethon rushes downward in an infernal Niagara Fall, and Dante and Virgil have to be transported to the eighth circle on the back of the monster Geryon, who is bidden by the Guide to make his circles large and his descent little.

Onward he goeth, swimming slowly, slowly,  
Wheels and descends.<sup>3</sup>

From the eighth to the ninth circle, or the floor, the poets are deposited by the giant Antaeus. Dante did not complete the tour of the *bolgia* around which the giants are immured, and Antaeus, at Virgil's request, lets them down along the face of the rocky precipice.

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." vi, 14; vii, 16, 100.

<sup>2</sup> "Inf." xi, 115.

<sup>3</sup> "Inf." xvii, 115-6.

The seventh circle has three subdivisions (*gironi*, "rounds,") and the eighth is called Malebolge, because it has ten trenches (*bolgie*, lit. "wallets"), which are connected by bridges. These subdivisions differ from the large upper circles only in respect of size, since they are complete circles, not segments of circles, each being lower and smaller in proportion as they approach the centre. The trenches of Malebolge are connected by bridges—a fact which goes to support the theory that has been broached with reference to the upper circles. Around the pit of Hell, which is a sort of hollow pedestal, are chained giants, whose forms tower above the bank of the last two *bolgie* from the navel upwards. The ninth circle, the floor of Hell, has four divisions, named Caina, Antenora, Tolomea, and Judecca.

#### 9. CLASSIFICATION OF SINS

Having dealt with the partitions, we have now to enumerate the categories of sinners consigned to those regions. This it will be convenient to do in a tabular form, naming at the same time, where possible, the presiding demons.

#### 10. PURGATORY: FORM AND DIMENSIONS

As regards shape, divisions, and direction, the Mount of Purgatory may almost be termed a replica of Hell. But there is an important difference. Hell is underground—it is plunged in gloom; whereas Purga-

CANTO.	CIRCLE.	DEMON.	SINNERS.
III	Ante-Hell	—	Nonentities and neutral angels
IV	I	—	Unbaptized infants and virtuous heathen
V	II	Minos	The Wanton
VI	III	Cerberus	The Gluttonous
VII	IV	Pluto	The Covetous
VIII	V	Phlegyas	The Irascible
IX, X, XI	VI	Furies	Heresiarchs
XII-XVII	VII	—	The Violent
XII	Girone i	Minotaur	Tyrants
XIII	„ ii	Harpies	Snicides
XIV, XV	„ iii	Capaneus	The Impious
XVI	—	—	Sodomites
XVII	—	—	Usurers
XVIII-XXX	VIII	—	The Fraudulent
XVIII	Borgia i	} 10 Demons }	Seducers and Panders
XVIII	„ ii		Flatterers
XIX	„ iii		Simoniacs
XX	„ iv		Soothsayers
XXI, XXII	„ v		Peculators
XXIII	„ vi		Hypocrites
XXIV, XXV	„ vii		Thieves
XXVI, XXVII	„ viii		Evil Counsellors
XXVIII	„ ix		Schismatics
XXIX, XXX	„ x		Alchemists and Forgers
XXXI	Pit of Hell	—	Giants
XXXII-XXXIV	IX	—	Traitors:
XXXII	Caina	—	To their kindred
XXXII, XXXIII	Antenora	—	To their country
XXXIII	Tolomea	—	To their friends
XXXIV	Judecca	Lucifer	To their lords and benefactors

tory is in the open air, and bathed in sunlight. Herein Dante departs from precedents set by mediaeval dreamers, and also, it may be said by Virgil, whose spirit-world is wholly in the interior of the earth.

The Mount of Purgatory, as we saw, is an island in the Southern Pacific, and, as far as Dante has described it, is chiefly remarkable for its height. It will be recollected that Ulysses says of the mountain, near which his vessel foundered, and which it appears safe to identify with the Mount of Purgatory:

It seemed so high  
As I had never any one beheld.<sup>1</sup>

If this mountain is not the Mount of Purgatory, the reference is rather pointless, but it becomes full of significance, if Ulysses was making for that forbidden strand, though unwittingly, without safe-conduct. The Mount of Purgatory was the only land in that waste of waters, and one feature of it is mentioned by anticipation, in the "Inferno"—namely, Lethe. Its extraordinary altitude is again noted in the "Purgatorio,"<sup>2</sup> where it is said:

Its summit was so high it vanquished sight.

It was proportionately steep, since Dante continues:

And the hill side precipitous far more  
Than line from middle quadrant to the centre.

That is, the ascent was at an angle of considerably more than forty-five degrees. Dante constantly uses

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xxvi, 134-5.

<sup>2</sup> iv, 40-2.

the phrase precipice of the downward slope of Hell, so that the *facilis descensus* of the latter region is contrasted with the arduous incline of Purgatory, up which, as a matter of fact, he has to climb on hands and knees.

If we might judge from the term *isoletta* ("Purgatorio," i, 100), its circumference was not great, but the expression may be used not in relation to other islands, but to the vast expanse of the celestial regions, of which it is the vestibule. Cato has just said:

For 'twere not fitting that the eye o'ercast  
By any mist should go before the first  
Angel, who is of those of Paradise.<sup>1</sup>

Dante, as we have observed, more than once, speaks contemptuously of the earth as a mere threshing-floor.<sup>2</sup> In the Duke Caetano di Sermoneta's plan of the universe as conceived by Dante, the Mount of Purgatory is depicted on a scale not inferior to that of Hell, being shown as a huge pyramidal projection with a tufted apex. In considering its size, account must be taken of the quantity of material of which it was composed. Some are of opinion that this included not merely the soil displaced by Lucifer in the southern hemisphere, but that from the hollow of Hell as well. This view depends on an interpretation of ll. 125-6 of the thirty-fourth canto of the "Inferno," which we have not adopted, but it may be correct.

Dante arrived at the Mount of Purgatory from the

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." i, 97-9.

<sup>2</sup> "Par." xxii; "De Mon."

bowels of the earth. This was not the regular route. Spirits destined to undergo purgation assemble at the mouth of the Tiber ("Purgatorio," ii, 100-105), whence they are transported in a barque propelled by the fanning of an angel's wings. They alight on a shelving shore, above which towers the well-nigh perpendicular steep. The lower part forms the Ante-Purgatory; the upper, Purgatory proper, which is divided into seven cornices. At the summit is the Earthly Paradise, which, in ordinary accounts, was located in the East of Asia. The ascent from the sea-shore is by means of a crooked path in the cloven rock; immediately before the gate of Purgatory is a stairway of three steps, and from the first to the second cornice is a rude stairway likened to the steps that lead up from Florence to the Church of the Miniato. Thereafter the approaches are much easier, but each new cornice is entered by a stairway, with an angel for gatekeeper. The Earthly Paradise is watered by two streams springing from one fount—Lethe and Eunoe. The only other feature in the Mount of Purgatory calling for special mention is a glen in the hill below, but apparently not far from, the gate admitting to Purgatory proper. This is a flowery, delightful spot—the Valley of Princes. In ascending the Mount of Purgatory Dante proceeds from left to right, thus taking the opposite direction to that which he had followed in Hell.



CANTO.	LOCALITY.	SINNERS.
III-IX	Ante-Purgatory	The Negligent
III	The Foot of the Mount	Who defer repentance through contumacy
IV	First Ridge	through sloth
V, VI	Second Ridge	till death by violence
VII, VIII	Valley of Princes	through the cares of state
(IX) X-XII	(Gate) Cornice I	The Proud
XIII, XIV	„ II	The Envious
XV, XVI,	„ III	The Irascible
XVII, XVIII	„ IV	The Slothful
XIX-XXI	„ V	The Avaricious
XXII-XXIV	„ VI	The Gluttonous
XXV-XXVII	„ VII	The Wanton
XXVII-XXXIII	Earthly Paradise	(Matilda)

## II. HEAVEN: ECONOMY

The system of the Ten Heavens has been already expounded in the chapter on the "Convivio," where also it was observed that the Empyrean Heaven is the abode of the Blessed. Nevertheless, when Dante is caught up from the Earthly Paradise to the Heaven of the Moon he beholds certain spirits, and so likewise in the other heavens, which he visits in succession. In Canto IV of the "Paradiso," Beatrice explains the reason to him. Plato, she tells him, erred in saying that the soul at death returns to its natal star. Spirits merely *manifest themselves* in the lower heavens to indicate degrees of blessedness.

They showed themselves here,<sup>1</sup> not because allotted  
The sphere had been to them, but to give sign  
Of the celestial which is least exalted.

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* in the Heaven of the Moon; "Par." iv, 37-9.

Since the various degrees are symbolical, the topic properly belongs to the following chapter, but for the sake of completeness, it will be well to set forth the apparent distribution of the spirits in the third great division of the after-world.

CANTO.	HEAVEN.	ANGELS.	SPIRITS.
I-IV	Moon	Angels	Those who have broken vows of chastity under compulsion
V	Mercury	Archangels	Great Men
VI-IX	Venus	Principalities	Lovers
X-XIII	Sun	Powers	Philosophers (Christian)
XIV-XVII	Mars	Virtues	Martyrs and Crusaders
XVIII-XX	Jupiter	Dominations	Just Rulers
XXI-XXII	Saturn	Thrones	The Contemplative
XXII-XXVII	Fixed Stars	Cherubim	Harvest of the Spheres. —Apostles
XXVIII-XXIX	Primum Mobile or Crystalline	Seraphim	(Beatrice)
XXX-XXXIII	Empyrean	—	(St. Bernard)

Dante's ascent from glory to glory is accomplished without material aid. Having been purged of mortal dross, he rises by a natural law, and is not conscious of the transit. Time after time he merely finds himself in a new and higher heaven; and the motive power is derived from Beatrice's look. There appears, therefore, to be no occasion for stairways similar to those that are found in Hell and Purgatory; yet this feature is not altogether lacking. It is met with in the Heaven of Saturn.

Within the crystal which, around the world  
Revolving, bears the name of its dear leader,

Under whom every wickedness lay dead,  
Coloured like gold on which the sunshine gleams,  
A stairway I beheld to such a height  
Uplifted, that mine eyes pursued it not.<sup>1</sup>

It reaches to the Empyrean, and is identical with Jacob's Ladder ("Paradiso," xxii, 61-72).<sup>2</sup> The empyrean, the Celestial Paradise, resembles the earthly Paradise, only that it is infinitely more glorious. There is a River of Light

'Twixt two banks,  
Depicted with an admirable spring.<sup>3</sup>

But it is all symbolical, apparent.

The river and the topazes  
Going in and out, and the laughing of the herbage,  
Are of their truth foreshadowing prefaces.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the River of Light is the grace of God, the flowers are souls, and the topazes are ministering angels.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that parallelism is not confined to the Terrestrial Paradise and

<sup>1</sup> "Par." xxi, 26-31.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gardner remarks: "Although the ladder only becomes visible in the seventh heaven, yet, just as Jacob's Ladder rests upon the earth, so (metaphorically speaking) does Dante's upon the shore of the mountain island of Purgatory. . . . In an earlier passage it is indicated to him by Beatrice that it is a ladder he is mounting, and that the lower heavens are merely the stairway of the Eternal Palace" ("Dante's Ten Heavens," pp. 19-20, 2nd ed.). Cf. "Par." xxi, 7-9.

<sup>3</sup> "Par." xxx, 62-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, 76-8.

the Empyrean. Other examples are Limbo and the Valley of Princes, the *diletto* monte ("Inferno," i), and the Mount of Purgatory, which have been mistakenly identified; and, most notable of all, the *circles* of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "COMMEDIA"—PRINCIPLES AND SYMBOLISM

#### I. MORAL SYSTEM: HELL

ON perusing the lists of the various classes of sinners and their respective grades in Hell and Purgatory it is natural to enquire whether the order or succession is based on any principle, and, if so, on what. Probably it will be recognized that there is an underlying principle, which is that the lower the circle, whether in Hell or in Purgatory, the more heinous the guilt of its occupants. This is undoubtedly the case, but it does not carry us far enough. We want to know why Dante regarded one sin as more venial than another.

Now in the first place it is to be remarked that Hell is peopled not only by bad Christians, but by heathen both good and bad. Therefore, as is just, the code or standard by which they are tried—and the judge is Minos, a *heathen* king transformed into a demon—is not the law of the Church, but the common law of morality, as expounded by *heathen* philosophers. The crimes for which these malefactors are condemned are such as have rendered them bad citizens, bad neigh-

bours, or bad friends. Those who have held aloof from social obligations are not received within the portals of Hell—they are objects of contempt and disgust.

It may be predicated of all the sins included in our first table that they might have been avoided by the light of nature without help from revelation, and that even what may be termed ecclesiastical offences are considered in their moral, rather than their spiritual, aspects. Take simony, for instance. It is treated as a species of fraud, a civil crime, a crime against the empire, as in the "De Monarchia." The heretics, again, are Epicureans, who deny the immortality of the soul and therefore future rewards and punishments. This is to strike at the root of all morality and fly in the face of reason and conscience, for Dante shows in the "Convivio" (ii, 9) that not only the noblest pagans, but men of all creeds and races are at one on the subject. There is, consequently, no excuse. The schismatics, also, include not only the authors of religious divisions, but political sedition-mongers.

The moral system of Hell is explained by Dante in the eleventh canto of the "Inferno";<sup>1</sup> and the passage is so important that it must be cited at length.

Of every malice that wins hate in Heaven  
Injury is the end; and all such end  
Either by force or fraud afflicteth others.  
But because fraud is man's peculiar vice,  
More it displeases God; and so stand lowest  
The fraudulent, and greater dole assails them.

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<sup>1</sup> ll. 22-90.

All the first circle of the Violent is;  
 But since force may be used against three persons,  
 In three rounds 'tis divided and constructed.  
 To God, to ourselves, and to our neighbours can we  
 Use force; I say on them and on their things,  
 As thou shalt hear with reason manifest.  
 A death by violence, and painful wounds,  
 Are to our neighbour given; and in his substance  
 Ruin, and arson, and injurious levies;  
 Whence homicides, and he who smites unjustly,  
 Marauders and freebooters, the first round  
 Tormenteth all in companies diverse.  
 Man may lay violent hands upon himself  
 And his own goods; and therefore in the second  
 Round must perforce without avail repent  
 Whoever of your world deprives himself,  
 Who games, and dissipates his property  
 And weepeth there, where he should jocund be.  
 Violence can be done the Deity,  
 In heart denying and blaspheming Him,  
 And by disdaining Nature and her bounty.  
 And for this reason doth the smallest round  
 Seal with its signet Sodom and Cahors,  
 And who, disdaining God, speaks from the heart.  
 Fraud, wherewithal is every conscience stung  
 A man may practice upon him who trusts,  
 And him who doth no confidence imburse.  
 This latter mode, it would appear, dissevers  
 Only the bond of love which Nature makes;  
 Wherefore within the second circle nestle  
 Hypocrisy, flattery, and who deals in magic,  
 Falsifications, theft, and simony,  
 Panders and barrators, and the like filth.  
 By the other mode forgotten is that love  
 Which Nature makes, and what is after added,  
 From which there is a special faith engendered.  
 Hence in the smallest circle, where the point is  
 Of the Universe, upon which Dis is seated,  
 Whoever betrays for ever is consumed.

Thus far, it will be observed, Virgil enlightens Dante with reference only to the three lowest circles—the seventh, the eighth, and the ninth—with their subdivisions. When he speaks of the *first* circle, he means the first relatively to the stage at which they have now arrived. What of the upper circles? Knowledge is not denied.

And I: "My Master, clear enough proceeds  
 Thy reasoning, and full well distinguishes  
 This cavern, and the people who possess it.  
 But tell me, those within the fat lagoon  
 Whom the wind drives, and whom the rain doth beat,  
 And who encounter with such bitter tongues,  
 Wherefore are they inside of the red city  
 Not punished, if God has them in his wrath,  
 And if he has not, wherefore in such fashion?"  
 And unto me he said: "Why wanders so  
 Thine intellect from that which it is wont?  
 Or, sooth, thy mind, where is it elsewhere looking?  
 Hast thou no recollection of those words  
 With which thine Ethics thoroughly discusses  
 The dispositions three that Heaven abides not—  
 Incontinence and Malice, and insane  
 Bestiality? And how Incontinence  
 Less God offendeth, and less blame attracts?  
 If thou regardest this conclusion well,  
 And to thy mind recallest who they are  
 That up outside are undergoing penance,<sup>1</sup>  
 Clearly wilt thou perceive why from these felons  
 They separated are, and why less wroth  
 Justice divine doth smite them with its hammer."

The inhabitants of Hell, then, are grouped into three main classes—the incontinent, the malicious,

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* those in the upper circles of *Hell*.



and the insanely criminal, the last of whom are sheer brutes. This classification is borrowed from the seventh book of Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics."

Witte, in his essay on "The Ethical Systems of 'Inferno' and 'Purgatorio,'" observes:<sup>1</sup> "To complete the quotation, Virgil has to include Aristotle's third class of evil-doing, due to 'mad brutishness' (*θηριότης*), which, however, is foreign to Dante's system. The Dante commentators go searching for this unhappy crime, *matta bestialitade*, in almost every corner of Hell as diligently as for envy and pride, but all in vain." It is strange that this difficulty should exist, since to us the three-fold division of Hell, marked by the intervals between the first six and the two following circles; and, again, between the eighth and the ninth circles—Dante being transported across the former by Geryon, and across the latter by Antaeus—clearly points to the ninth circle as the quarter of the criminally insane. Who are the occupants of this circle? They are giants, traitors, and Lucifer. All are mad. The giants and Lucifer prove this by having fought against God, which is the acmé of madness, while the enormity of treason is represented as possible only to those in whom wickedness has quenched the light of reason.

In the "Convivio" (iii, 7) Dante, in distinguishing the degrees of the scale of being from the highest to the lowest, remarks that many men are so vile and of so base a condition that they appear as they were nothing else than brutes; and in the same treatise (iv, 7) he

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence and Wicksteed's tr., p. 127.

asserts that a man without reason is no longer a man but a "brute animal," a "beast." By "madness" Dante does not intend that such "animals" do not possess the faculty of adapting means to ends—they may be cunning enough—but that they have lost all perception of right and wrong. They are totally abandoned and depraved—*monsters* who combine violence with fraud.

If we turn to the thirty-first canto of the "Inferno," we shall find the following comment regarding the giants:

Certainly Nature, when she left the making  
Of *animals* like these, did well indeed  
In taking such executors from Mars;  
And if of elephants and whales she doth not  
Repent her, whosoever looketh subtly  
More just and more discreet will hold her for it;  
For where the argument of intellect  
Is added unto evil will and power,  
No rampart can the people make against it.<sup>1</sup>

In the succeeding canto Dante sees Count Ugolino gnawing the skull of Count Ruggieri, and thus accosts him:

O thou who showest by such *bestial* sign  
Thy hatred against him whom thou art eating,  
Tell me the wherefore.<sup>2</sup>

The most startling proof of all is found in the statements of Frate Alberigo in Canto XXXIII. In the passage of the "Convivio," before referred to (iv, 7), Dante explains that the words, "who is dead and goeth through the world," in Canzone III, signify a

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xxxi, 49-57.

<sup>2</sup> "Inf." xxxii, 133-5.

very vile person—a beast. Now Dante meets in the nethermost circle of Hell the souls of certain individuals, whose bodies are alive, and the Frate, who is of the number, thus accounts for the phenomenon:

And he to me: "How may my body fare  
Up in the world, no knowledge I possess.  
Such an advantage hath this Ptolomaea,  
That oftentimes the soul descendeth here  
Sooner than Atropos in motion sets it;  
And that thou mayest more willingly remove  
From off my countenance these glassy tears,  
Know that, as soon as any soul betrays  
As I have done, his body by a demon  
Is taken from him, who thereafter rules it,  
Until his time has wholly been revolved.  
Itself down rushes into such a cistern;  
And still perchance above appears the body  
Of yonder shade that winters here behind me.  
This thou should'st know, if thou hast just come down;  
It is Ser Branca d'Oria, and many years  
Have passed away, since he was thus locked up.  
"I think," said I to him, "thou dost deceive me;  
For Branca d'Oria is not dead as yet,  
And eats, and drinks, and sleeps, and puts on clothes."  
"In moat above," said he, "of Malebranche  
There where is boiling the tenacious pitch,  
As yet had Michel Zanche not arrived,  
When this one left a devil in his stead  
In his own body, and one near of kin,  
Who made together with him the betrayal.  
But hitherward stretch out thy hand forthwith,  
Open mine eyes;"—And open them I did not,  
And to be rude to him was courtesy.

Dante concludes :

Ah, Genoese! ye men at variance  
With every virtue, full of every vice!

Wherefore are ye not scattered from the world?  
For with the *vilest* spirit of Romagna  
I found of you one such, who for his deeds  
In soul already in Cocytus bathes,  
And still above in body seems alive! <sup>1</sup>

This evidence, it appears to us, is convincing that mad brutishness is the sin punished in the ninth circle of Hell. Treason, however, as Dante shows in the eleventh canto, is an aggravated form of fraud. The intervals, therefore, point to a much deeper degree of guilt than a difference in the general quality of the offence. The complex nature of Dante's system may be illustrated by another circumstance. The first six circles are allotted to sins of incontinence or want of self-control. Injury, in these cases, is not the end. For all that the sixth circle, in which the heretics are confined, is included within the walls of the City of Dis. This is apparently because incontinence of thought is potentially the source of many crimes, especially of impiety and blasphemy, which are punished in the seventh circle as violence against God, but not less directly of all sins that imply any degree of malice or deliberation. Thus it may be termed the inception of that mad brutishness, which is not less, but more mad, because it is deliberate, and signifies the widest departure from rational and virtuous principles in act. As Ruskin puts it: "It is necessary to serpent-tail this pit with the upper hell by a district for insanity without deed; the Fury which has brought horror to the eyes, and hardness to the heart, and yet,

<sup>1</sup> "Inf." xxxiii, 122-57.

having possessed itself of noble persons, issues in no malicious crime. Therefore the sixth circle of the upper hell is walled in together with the central pit, as one grievous city of the dead."<sup>1</sup>

If mad brutishness expresses the deepest degree of guilt in respect of "man's peculiar vice," other sins of malice are divided into two large categories of violence and fraud. Dante was clearly indebted for this classification to Cicero's "*De Officiis*" (i, 13, 41): "Since injury may be wrought in two modes, that is either by violence or by fraud, fraud seems as it were proper to a fox, violence to a lion; each is most alien to man, but fraud is worthy of the greater hatred." There is a reminiscence of this distinction in the confession of Guido da Montefeltro ("*Inferno*," xxvii, 73-75).

When I was still the form of bone and pulp  
My mother gave to me, the deeds I did  
Were not those of a lion, but a fox.

It undoubtedly causes some surprise to discover the usurers, not among the fraudulent, but among the violent. Dante himself is perplexed at this arrangement, and interrogates Virgil concerning the reason. It is explained to him<sup>2</sup> that the usurer does violence to Nature and the laws of God, which ordain that man should live and thrive on the fruits of the earth and honest labour. It may be said that usury has the sanction of custom, and that those who suffer from it, submit to its exactions voluntarily and with their

<sup>1</sup> "*Fors Clavigera*," Letter XXIV.

<sup>2</sup> "*Inf.*" xi, 96-111.

eyes open. It is, therefore, not exactly fraud, but it is on the border line, and there, as a matter of fact, we find its professors—

Upon the outermost  
Head of that seventh circle.<sup>1</sup>

This is another instance of what Ruskin calls “serpent-tailing.”

Another matter for surprise respects the persons Dante makes examples of. The fact is, that he first constructs his hell in accordance with what appears to him philosophical accuracy, and thereafter assigns historical characters, personal acquaintances, and others of whom he has knowledge to the circles designed for the punishment of those crimes of which they have been guilty. They may or may not have redeeming features; if they are convicted of committing an offence, no mercy is shown to them—they are banished to the appropriate circle or gyre or *bolgia*, there for ever to remain. Thus Alexander the Great, though Dante praises him in the “Convivio” for his liberality, is found among the tyrants in the seventh circle of Hell. There are two explanations of this treatment. One is that Dante deals with these personages as *types*, and his praise or blame of them depends on his immediate purpose or point of view. Cato was a suicide, but Dante, ignoring this circumstance, sets him over the Ante-Purgatory. Brutus, on the other hand, suffers excruciating and ignominious torture in the heart of Hell. But we must beware of pressing

<sup>1</sup> “Inf.” xvii, 43-4.

this explanation too far; otherwise Hell will be merely a theatre for the exhibition of various sins, and the sinners will be masquers, speaking and posing for histrionic effect. Dante believed in an *essential* Hell; and, whatever inconsistencies may be detected in his attitude towards individuals, we cannot doubt that he sought to frame his procedure in conformity with the strictest justice. There must, therefore, be another explanation, which Ruskin, as we believe, states quite correctly: "You might at first think that Dante's divisions were narrow and artificial, in assigning each circle to one sin only, as if every man did not variously commit many. But it is always one sin, the favourite, which destroys souls. That conquered, all others fall with it; that victorious, all others follow with it."<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, surprise has been felt that the penal scheme of the "Purgatorio" does not correspond, in all respects, with that of the "Inferno," being partly defective, and partly redundant. The quest for pride and envy in the economy of Hell has been inspired by the imagined necessity of squaring the two systems. No such necessity exists. In Hell punishments are retributive. They are inflicted, save in the sixth circle, for definite crimes. In Purgatory punishments are reformatory. They are designed to correct evil inclinations, to eradicate the remains of the old Adam after repentance has procured the forgiveness of sins which must otherwise have been expiated in the circles of Hell. Those evil inclinations have been plainly revealed by forgiven sins, and now what is im-

<sup>1</sup> "Fors Clavigera" (*loc. cit.*).

portant is the condition of the soul thus revealed. Sin is treated no longer as a crime, but as a symptom of a disordered state of the soul. The spirits in Hell are lost—their case is irremediable. Those in Purgatory are wandering, but recovered sheep, which are being brought back to the fold.

## 2. MORAL SYSTEM: PURGATORY

The clue to the meaning of the "Purgatorio" is supplied in a passage of the seventeenth canto already cited in the chapter on the "Convivio," particularly the lines:

"Neither Creator nor a creature ever,  
 Son," he began, "was destitute of love  
 Natural or spiritual; and thou knowest it.  
 The natural was ever without error;  
 But err the other may by evil object,  
 Or by too much, or by too little vigour.  
 While in the first it well directed is,  
 And in the second moderates itself,  
 It cannot be the cause of sinful pleasure;  
 But when to ill it turns, and with more care  
 Or lesser than it ought runs after good,  
 'Gainst the Creator works his own creation.<sup>1</sup>

By "evil object," Dante goes on to explain, he means the ill of one's neighbour. Now in "Inferno," x, 22-3, he has stated:

Of every malice that wins hate in Heaven  
 Injury is the end; and all such end  
 Either by force or fraud afflicteth others.

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<sup>1</sup> ll. 91-102.



There it is a question of the end and the means; here of the motives, which are Pride, Envy and Anger. These motives operate in different ways. Anger naturally manifests itself in deeds of violence; envy is associated with ordinary forms of fraud, and pride with the supreme crime of treason. Thus we find that, just as the traitors are in the lowest circle of Hell, so the proud are on the lowest cornice of Purgatory. It was through pride that Satan fell, and that the giants were banished to the abyss, but they are punished, not for their pride, but for the specific crime of treason, which was due to pride. One of the proudest spirits in Hell is Farinata, but we meet with him in the sixth circle, not in the ninth. The correspondence, therefore, as between the first, second, and third cornices of Purgatory, and the seventh, eighth, and ninth circles of Hell, is only general, but it is none the less real, and, we cannot doubt, intentional. The former are concerned with the *principii*, or seeds; the latter, with the *effetti*, or fruits.<sup>1</sup>

Both in the "Inferno" and the "Purgatorio," in which the sins of incontinence are presented in the same order, sexual passion is treated as more venial than anger, on the ground that animal love has a certain kinship to spiritual love. Herein Dante differs from his master, Aristotle, who held that anger is the nobler emotion as implying more reason.<sup>2</sup> In the "Purgatorio" anger is one of those inclinations that have an evil object, the ill of one's neighbour, and is not considered as a sin of excess. *Accidia*, spiritual

<sup>1</sup> "Conv." iv, 16.

<sup>2</sup> "Nic. Ethics," vii, 6.

sloth or lukewarmness, represents the love that errs by too little vigour, and constitutes a single category. It is useless to look for this fault in the "Inferno," in which Dante regards sin from a judicial point of view. Here it is that of a spectator at the games, and the idea is one of running a race—the Christian race—in which the spirits have proved awkward competitors. Those in the Ante-Purgatory have started late; those on the first three cornices have not followed a straight course, having allowed themselves to be diverted from the true goal; those on the fourth cornice have lagged, whilst those on the last three cornices have been hindered by worldly and carnal desires. They have not laid aside every weight nor the sin that doth so easily beset them. Their intemperance has been a clog. The sinners in Hell, on the other hand, have had no share in this race. They have been without spiritual aspirations; they have known neither the fear nor the love of God.

As there are varying degrees of guilt or demerit in Hell and Purgatory, so there are varying degrees of merit in Paradise. Even in Paradise the notion of punishment is not entirely absent, since those who have been compelled to violate monastic vows against their wishes form the lowest order of the Blessed. This circumstance occasions Dante some little perplexity. That these spirits should suffer in consequence of the force exercised against them by others seems like a contradiction of Divine justice. On further inquiry the punishment is discovered to be rather apparent than real. The spirits in question are per-

fectly happy, perfectly content with the will of God their King; they merely manifest themselves, they do not reside in the Heaven of the Moon—and yet they are punished, at least formally. Why is that? Beatrice thus explains:

If it be violence when he who suffers  
 Co-operates not with him who uses force,  
 These souls were not on that account excused;  
 For will is never quenched unless it will,  
 But operates as nature doth in fire,  
 If violence a thousand times distort it.  
 Hence if it yieldeth more or less it seconds  
 The force.

Many times, brother, has it come to pass  
 That, to escape from peril, with reluctance  
 That has been done it was not right to do.

At this point I desire thee to remember  
 That force with will commingles, and they cause  
 That the offences cannot be excused.  
 Will absolute consenteth not to evil;  
 But in so far consenteth as it fears,  
 If it refrain, to fall into more harm.<sup>1</sup>

We have here a second instance of the linking up of the eternal realms. If the proud are punished in the last circle of Hell and on the first cornice of Purgatory, the sensual are chastened on the highest cornice of Purgatory, and those who have broken vows of chastity appear in the lowest of the ten heavens.

<sup>1</sup> "Par." iv, 73-80; 100-2; 106-12.

## 3. SYMBOLISM

The "Commedia" is an allegory, and in at least two passages of the poem Dante reminds his readers of this characteristic. The first is found in the ninth canto of the "Inferno" (ll. 61-63):

O ye who have undistempered intellects,  
Observe the doctrine that conceals itself  
Beneath the veil of the mysterious verses!

Again, in the eighth canto of the "Purgatorio" (ll. 18-20), he says:

Here, Reader, fix thine eyes well on the truth,  
For now indeed so subtile is the veil,  
Surely to penetrate within is easy.

In the former instance the "doctrine" regards the parts which the Gorgon and the Furies play in the torture of the damned. According to the ancient fable, to look upon the Gorgon's head was to be turned into stone, by which Dante intends us to understand that the sinner is petrified with despair. Similarly, the Furies symbolize remorse for past sins. In the latter case, the allegory is drawn from the familiar story of the Fall, and presumably for that reason Dante deemed it easy to decipher. His commentators have not found it so. The idea is, of course, temptation obstructed by angelic surveillance; and night, when vigilance is relaxed and the faculties are lulled in slumber, is precisely the time when man is most exposed to the suggestions of the Evil One. This danger is recognized in the hymn of the Church,

which the spirits have just sung at Complines, as also in Bishop Ken's well-known lines:

May no ill dreams disturb my rest,  
No powers of darkness me molest.

Is that all? Perhaps Dante intimates that the serpent had been a constant visitor at court, and that his ability to harm had been destroyed by the prayer of the penitent princes only when night—the night of death—was approaching. The angels' swords are blunted at the point to signify that the serpent is to be bruised, not killed, or that they are to be used merely for defence.

The punishments of the different classes of sinners are emblematic of their sins. Everybody knows the lines:

The passionate heart of the poet  
Is *whirled* into folly and vice.

This is the penalty of the sensual in the "Inferno" (v. 31-33).

The infernal hurricane that never rests  
Hurtles the spirits onward in its rapine;  
*Whirling* them round, and, smiting, it molests them.

In the following circle the gluttonous are punished—how? By existing in a filthy and noisome swamp, lashed by hail, rain, and snow, symbolical of their drinking, and rent, flayed, and quartered by Cerberus, which is symbolical of their eating. Cerberus has tusks; there is therefore in his composition something of the boar—as greedy an animal as the dog, and far more uncleanly. It is noticeable also that the spokesman of the gluttonous is one Ciacco, whose name

signifies "hog." This may be paralleled by the name of one of the sinners in the ninth circle, in which, as we have shown, mad brutishness is punished—Camicione de' Pazzi. The correspondence between the sin and the penalty is excellently observed in this ninth circle, for pride is frigid and treason the most cold-blooded of crimes. It will not be amiss to quote Ruskin's remarks on this point:

"The two lower hells are for those who have wilfully done mischief to other people. And of these some do open injury and some deceitful injury, and of these the rogues are put lower, but there is a greater distinction in the manner of sin than its simplicity or roguery; namely, whether it be done in hot blood or cold blood. The injurious sins, done in hot blood—that is to say, under the influence of passion—are in the midmost hell; but the sins done in cold blood, without passion, or, more accurately, contrary to passion, far down *below* the freezing-point, are put in the lowest hell: the ninth circle . . . I have myself been taken far enough down amongst the diminished circles to see this nether hell—the hell of traitors; and to know what people do not usually know of treachery, that it is not the fraud, but the *cold-heartedness*, which is chiefly dreadful in it. Therefore this nether hell is of ice, not fire; and of ice that nothing can break. . . . No more wandering of the feet in labyrinth like this, and the eyes, once cruelly tearless, now blind with frozen tears."<sup>1</sup>

In this connection we may not forget the Old Man

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*

of Crete. The rivers of Hell—really one river, which in one place is fiery hot and in another ice-bound—are formed of the tears of all the ages gathered into one spot, and thus the sorrows of humanity are the material of its tormentors' torment. In these various ways is disclosed the nature both of sin in general and of particular sins; and the allegorical intention of the poem, that of showing how by merit or demerit man deserves reward or punishment, is realized.

#### 4. ALLEGORICAL BASIS

As symbolism pervades the entire work, even to the minutest details, it is impossible to deal with the subject at all adequately in the present work, but there are certain broad lines, or strands of thought, which are expressed figuratively, and it is imperative that we should notice them. One is the notion elaborated in the "*De Monarchia*"—the twofold destiny of man. He is designed to be happy here, and happy hereafter. Philosophy, the law, Empire will secure the former result; divinity, grace, the Church, the latter.<sup>1</sup> But the agencies are not entirely distinct: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;"<sup>2</sup> and the Empire, or legitimate human government, is as truly God's ministry as the Church. These ideas constitute the backbone of the work in its philosophical aspects.

Let us turn to the opening canto. Dante finds himself in a forest. What does this forest signify?

<sup>1</sup> "*De Mon.*" iii, 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Gal.* iii, 24.

Undoubtedly the world of unreclaimed humanity, which, if properly directed politically and spiritually, would be counted a fruitful field.<sup>1</sup> Dante speaks of it also as a valley, at the termination of which is a mountain. Now the term "valley" is applied to Hell (*e.g.*, "Inferno," iv, 9, xii, 40), and Purgatory, or the place of repentance, is represented as a mountain. By some the two mountains have been identified, and in a certain sense rightly. There is no question that a correspondence exists and was intended, but Dante does not mean that he visited the essential, or local Mount of Purgatory until he was conducted to it by Virgil, who says to him:

I will be thy guide  
And lead thee hence through the eternal place  
Where thou shalt hear the desperate lamentations,  
Shalt see the ancient spirits disconsolate,  
Who cry out each one for the second death;  
And thou shalt see those who contented are  
Within the fire, because they hope to come  
Whene'er it may be, to the blessed people.<sup>2</sup>

The *dilettoso monte*, therefore, is the moral, or temporal, equivalent of the Mount of Purgatory, and especially of the Earthly Paradise, which is the sojourn of purified spirits on the eve of translation to the realms of eternal bliss. In the same way the forest is the moral, or temporal, equivalent of Hell. In "Inferno," iv, 64-66, we meet with the identical metaphor:

We ceased not to advance because he spake,  
But still were passing onward through the forest  
The forest, say I, of thick-crowded ghosts.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, xxix, 17; xxxii, 15.

<sup>2</sup> "Inf." i, 113-20.



Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise are to be understood in *both* a literal and an allegorical sense; the forest and the mountain of the opening canto in an allegorical sense only. In this allegorical sense the forest is reproduced in the Earthly Paradise, where the car of the Church is dragged by a giant (the King of France) across the forest (from Rome to Avignon).<sup>1</sup> The place in which Dante beholds the vision or pageant is evidently far removed from the scene which is typified; and the spot in which Dante seeks to escape from the forest of sin is equally distant from the real Mount of Purgatory.

Dante's escape is impeded by the apparition of three beasts—a panther, a lion, and a she-wolf—which thrust him back into the low land. More allegory, the source of which is not doubtful. It is plainly derived from Jeremiah, v, 6. The beasts are emblematical of Lust, Pride, and Avarice respectively. That the panther represents lust is shown by a further reference in "Inferno," xvi, 108, in which Dante says:

I had a cord around about me girt,  
And therewithal I whilom had designed  
To take the panther with the painted skin.

Buti informs us that Dante was at one time a Cordelier, *i.e.* a member of the Third Order of Franciscans, whose girdle symbolized a desire to rein in bodily lusts. Whether this were so or not, the meaning of the figure remains unaffected. It will be observed that Dante's attitude towards the panther is quite

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxxii, 148-60.

different from his behaviour towards the other two beasts. He does not fear the panther; he is delighted with her "variegated skin." The lion and the wolf, on the other hand, fill him with unspeakable terror. He thought to take the panther with his girdle; from the lion and the wolf he could only flee in abject confusion. The reason is that the lustful passion signified by the panther was in his own breast, while the pride and avarice were those of others. The wolf unquestionably stands for avarice, since "Purgatorio" xx, 10-12, contains the malediction:

Accursed may'st thou be thou old she-wolf,  
That more than all the other beasts hast prey,  
Because of hunger infinitely hollow!

and later, in the same canto, Hugh Capet asks:

What more, O Avarice, canst thou do to us,  
Since thou my blood so to thyself hast drawn,  
It careth not for its own proper flesh?<sup>1</sup>

Dante seems to have regarded avarice as practically universal,<sup>2</sup> but as particularly reprehensible in the clergy, who, from the Popes downwards, were addicted to it:

In garb of shepherds the rapacious wolves  
Are seen from here above o'er all the pastures.  
O wrath of God, why dost thou slumber still?<sup>3</sup>

In the nineteenth canto of the "Inferno" (ll. 90-115) Dante roundly denounces Pope Nicholas for his

<sup>1</sup> ll. 82-4.

<sup>2</sup> "Par." xxvii, 121-48; cf. Canz. x, 4.

<sup>3</sup> "Par." xxvii, 55-8.

simony, and identifies the papacy with the great whore of the Revelation. It may be noted that in Latin one of the meanings of *lupa* (literally a wolf) is harlot. We are now in a position to see at whom, or what, Dante is especially hinting in the similitude of the she-wolf of the opening canto. It was the intervention of the Curia in the affairs of Florence that occasioned his exile and all the bitterness associated therewith. We hear more of the whore in the last two cantos of the "Purgatorio," where she and a giant are represented as kissing and sinning. The giant is Philip le Bel, "the bane of France." He is called a giant partly on account of his great power, and partly because that power is directed against the Empire, a divinely appointed institution. Like the giants bound in the Pit of Hell, he fights against God, *i.e.* in the person of His anointed. It is the *pride* of this monarch that is especially symbolized by the lion, which appears simultaneously with the she-wolf. The accuracy of this interpretation may be thus shown. In the thirty-third canto of the "Purgatorio"<sup>1</sup> it is said:

One sent from God shall slay the thievish woman  
And that same *giant*, who is sinning with her.

With this compare "Inferno," i, 100-111:

Many the animals<sup>2</sup> with whom she weds,  
And more they shall be still, until the Greyhound  
Comes, who shall make her perish in her pain.

. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> ll. 44-5.

<sup>2</sup> Giants are called "animals." See "Inf." xxxi, 50.

Through every city shall he hunt her down,  
 Until he shall have driven her back to Hell,  
 There from whence envy first did let her loose.

It is important to observe that Dante does not mean the papacy itself, the death of which has been already accomplished by the transference of the Holy See to Avignon—a fact which he laments (“Purgatorio,” xx, 85-90). It is the spirit of avarice that has taken possession of the pastors (“Inferno,” xix, 106-9) that he wishes to see exorcised. He says of them:

Your avarice afflicts the world.<sup>1</sup>

while he describes the Capetian dynasty as

That malignant plant  
 Which overshadows all the Christian world.<sup>2</sup>

Now we have to remember that Dante, in his poem, is a representative man living in the fourteenth century under conditions brought about by the decay of Christianity. Therefore the avarice of the hierarchy, and the ambition of the Royal house of France, are the chief external hindrances to the reformation of *society*, the frailty of human nature which is too easily allured by “trivial good” (“Purgatorio,” xvi, 91), “the false images of good” (“Purgatorio,” xxx, 131), “things fallacious,” “little girl or other vanity of such brief use” (“Purgatorio,” xxxi, 56, 59-60), being a third and internal hindrance.

Commentators are apt to forget Dante’s representative character, and interpret the symbols with refer-

<sup>1</sup> “Inf.” xix, 104.

<sup>2</sup> “Purg.” xx, 43-4.

ence to his personal circumstances. By some the panther is supposed to point to the gay world of Florence, whilst others lay stress on the prevalence of pride, avarice, and corruption in that city. No doubt Dante thought of Florence more than any other place, but he is no longer a mere local *dicitore*. He has transcended that limit and become a poet, whose horizon is not even bounded by the world of living men, but stretches far away in the profoundest depths of the universe and eternity. In the world of living men, which is, after all, his main, though concealed theme, he sees anarchy—anarchy arising from the bad example of the Church and her dereliction of duty on the one hand, and tyranny and usurpation in the state on the other.

O Covetousness, that mortals dost ingulf  
 Beneath thee so, that no one hath the power  
 Of drawing back his eyes from out thy waves.

Thou, that it may not be a marvel to thee,  
 Think that on earth there is no one who governs;  
 Whence goes astray the human family.

But there is hope.

Ere January be unwintered wholly  
 By the centesimal on earth neglected,  
 Shall these supernal circles roar so loud,  
 The tempest that has been so long awaited  
 Shall whirl the poops about where are the prows;  
 So that the fleet shall run its course direct,  
 And the true fruit shall follow on the flower.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Par." xxvii, 121-48.

In the sixteenth canto of the "Purgatorio"<sup>1</sup> Dante says to Marco Lombardo:

The world forsooth is utterly deserted  
By every virtue as thou tellest me,  
And with iniquity is big and covered;  
But I beseech thee point me out the cause  
That I may see it, and to others show it.

In his reply Marco affirms:

The laws exist, but who sets hands to them?  
No one; because the shepherd who precedes  
Can ruminate, but cleaveth not the hoof;  
Wherefore the people that perceives its guide  
Strike only at the good for which it hankers,  
Feeds upon that, and farther seeketh not.  
Clearly canst thou perceive that evil guidance  
The cause is that has made the world depraved,  
And not that nature is corrupt in you.  
Rome that reformed the world accustomed was  
Two suns to have, which one road and the other  
Of God and of the world made manifest.  
One has the other quenched, and to the crosier  
The sword is joined, and ill beseemeth it  
That by main force one with the other go,  
Because, being joined, one feareth not the other;  
If thou believe not, think upon the grain,  
For by its seed each herb is recognized.

The sword joined to the crosier represents the unholy alliance between the Papacy and the Fleur-de-lys, which is typified in the proem by the conjunction of the lion and the wolf. The two suns, which make manifest the two roads of religion and morality, are those of the Church and the Empire, or, in other

<sup>1</sup> ll. 96-114.

words, revelation and reason, which have a common source in God, the planet which leads aright by every road ("Inferno," i, 18).

The Empire being only a little less inviolable than the Church, we comprehend why in the last canto of the "Inferno," the three-headed "Emperor of the Kingdom dolorous" is depicted crunching with his teeth Judas Iscariot, and Brutus and Cassius. Their guilt is not quite equal, and therefore Judas has the greatest pain. His head is inside, while the others hang head downwards. The assassins, refusing Caesar, have an emperor of their own choosing, and their fate is a warning to those who refuse Caesar's successor. The sixth canto of the "Paradiso" contains a sketch of the Roman Empire, symbolized as the eagle or "bird of God," and the public or sacred standard, the object being to show the madness of those who resist or prostitute it. The terms in which the passage concludes should be carefully marked:

And let not this new Charles e'er strike it down,  
 He and his Guelfs, but let him fear the talons  
 That from a nobler *lion* stripped the fell.  
 Already oftentimes the sons have wept  
 The father's crime, and let him not believe  
 That *God will change His scutcheon for the lilies.*<sup>1</sup>

For the welfare of Christendom it is essential that the forces of evil betokened by the three beasts should be taken out of the way. As regards the wolf and her ally, the means will be violent. A greyhound is to

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<sup>1</sup> "Par." vi. 106-11.

hunt her down. As his epistles prove, Dante at one time thought that the Emperor Henry VII was to be the destined Messiah, who was to restore all things; and in the thirty-third canto of the "Purgatorio"<sup>1</sup> we meet with a prophecy which looks as if it might refer to him.

Without an heir shall not forever be  
 The eagle that left his plumes upon the car,  
 Whence it became a monster, then a prey;  
 For verily I see, and hence narrate it,  
 The stars already near to bring the time,  
 From every hindrance safe and every bar,  
 Within which a Five-hundred, Ten, and Five,  
 One sent from God shall slay the thievish woman  
 And that same giant who is sinning with her.

This is what is known as the DVX prophecy, and the arithmetical allusion to the coming avenger is evidently copied from Revelation, xiii, 18: "Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is a number of a man, and his number is six hundred threescore and six." Most persons will be content to find in the number the ingredients of the Latin word *dux* ("leader"), but Dr. Moore, in a paper of great learning, propounds the theory that Henry of Luxemburg is intended, because in Hebrew the numerical value of the letters composing the name Arrico—another form of Henry—represents precisely the total, 515. This is very ingenious, but for various reasons does not seem probable. In several passages of the poem Henry's failure is recognized,<sup>2</sup> and amongst them may be reckoned that above quoted.

<sup>1</sup> ll. 37-45.

<sup>2</sup> See "Par." xvii, 82; xxx, 133-38.



The eagle is without an heir, because Henry is dead, and his successor has not taken the needful steps to constitute himself the lawful head of the Holy Roman Empire. The Eagle's feathering of the car, *i.e.* the Church, is evidently an allusion to the donation of Constantine, and the heir of the Eagle must signify an emperor. But it does not seem necessary to identify the heir with the *dux*, who is to slay the usurpers, though it is certainly natural to construe the passage in this sense. The leader from whom so much was expected may have been Can Grande della Scala. *Cane* is the Italian for "dog," and the Scaligers bore a mastiff on their coat-of-arms. There would therefore be much propriety in making him the *veltro*, which was really not a greyhound, but a heavily-built dog, strong enough to kill bears and wild boars (see Holbrook's "Dante and the Animal Kingdom," p. 118, *note*). It has been objected that the function assigned to the "greyhound" is too wide for any local potentate, but that may not have been Dante's opinion in the case of this particular ruler, of whom he entertained such extravagant hopes that he dared not commit them to writing.

"With him shalt thou see one who at his birth  
Has by this star of strength been so impressed  
That notable shall his achievements be.

Not yet the people are aware of him  
Through his young age, since only nine years yet  
Around about him have these wheels revolved.

But ere the Gascon cheat the noble Henry  
Some sparkles of his virtue shall appear  
In caring not for silver nor for toil.

So recognized shall his magnificence  
Become hereafter, that his enemies  
Will not have power to keep mute tongues about it.  
On him rely, and on his benefits;  
By him shall many people be transformed,  
Changing condition rich and mendicant;  
And written in thy mind thou hence shalt bear  
Of him, but shalt not say it"—and things said he  
Incredible to those who shall be present.<sup>1</sup>

In 1318 Can Grande was elected Captain of the Ghibelline League, but there was nothing incredible in that. What can Dante have meant? It seems to us that he can have meant only this—that Can Grande was to restore the line of Roman Emperors in the same way that Charlemagne did. He had come to despair of the German Alberts, and so turned his gaze to his own Italian countrymen, the stock from which the original Roman Emperors had sprung.

The slaying of the lion and the wolf was to be accomplished by the sword, by a great and salutary revolution. The taming of the panther, or, in other words, the moral and spiritual transformation of the human race, demanded other and more deliberate methods. In the concluding chapter of the "*De Monarchia*" Dante affirms that "we attain to the blessedness of this life through the teachings of philosophy provided that we follow them, working in accordance with moral and intellectual virtues, whereas we attain to the blessedness of life eternal through spiritual teachings, which transcend human reason,

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<sup>1</sup> "*Par.*" xvii, 76-93.

provided that we follow them, working in accordance with the theological virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity. These conclusions and means (although the former have been shown us by human logic, which has become thoroughly known to us through philosophers; and the latter by the Holy Ghost, who has revealed to us the supernatural truth necessary for us through the Prophets and Hagiographers, through the Son of God, Jesus Christ and His disciples) human appetite would neglect, unless men, like horses, wandering through their own brutishness, were kept in the way by bit and bridle. Wherefore man had need of twofold guidance in accordance with the twofold end; namely, the Supreme Pontiff, who should conduct mankind to life eternal after the light of revelation; and the Emperor, who should guide mankind to temporal happiness after the teachings of philosophy."

In the scheme of the "Commedia" Virgil represents moral philosophy. Dante points out in the first book of the "De Monarchia" (ch. xi) that the Roman poet sang in his "Bucolics":

Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna;

and he explains that "by the Virgin was intended Justice, which was also called *Astraea*. The reign of Saturn meant the best age, which was also termed the golden. Justice is most possible under a monarch: therefore, for the best regulation of the world, it is requisite that there should be Monarchy or Empire." Virgil was the laureate of Imperial Rome; he had celebrated the feats of "pious Aeneas," and had re-

ported on the nether regions in the spirit of a philosopher. Accordingly, he might be deemed eminently qualified to bring in a new earth. He is competent to guide Dante through Hell, and through Purgatory as far as the Earthly Paradise, where, like Moses, after conducting the Children of Israel through the wilderness to the verge of the Promised Land, he must needs resign his leadership.

The temporal fire and the eternal  
Son, thou hast seen, and to a place art come  
Where of myself no farther I discern.  
*By intellect and art I here have brought thee.*<sup>1</sup>

The teachings of philosophy have attained their end in temporal happiness; for the attainment of eternal happiness other guidance is necessary; namely, revelation, which is symbolized by Beatrice. It is worthy of remark that Virgil does not know Purgatory as he knows Hell, obviously because he is a pagan, whose residence is in Limbo. Moreover, Purgatory is an ascent, not only to the Earthly, but to the Heavenly Paradise, and, though in his dream Dante imagines it is the Eagle that snatches him<sup>2</sup> upward "even to the fire," in reality it is a blessed lady who bears him from the valley of Princes to Purgatory, of which she shows Virgil the gate.

There came a Lady and said "I am Lucia;  
Let me take this one up, who is asleep;  
So I will make his journey easier for him."  
Sordello and the other noble shapes  
Remained; she took thee, and, as day grew bright,  
Upward she came, and I upon her footsteps.

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxvii, 127-30.

<sup>2</sup> "Purg." ix, 19-21.

She laid thee here; and first her beauteous eyes  
 That open entrance pointed out to me;  
 Then she and sleep together went away.<sup>1</sup>

Lucia has been mentioned before in the poem—in Canto II of the "Inferno"—and her action on this occasion is in keeping with the part she has previously played. Dante is her liege or votary,<sup>2</sup> probably because he was born on her feast day, and therefore thought of her as his guardian angel. But there is more in the relation than that.

### 5. THE MYSTERY OF CONVERSION

Dante owes his salvation to the ministry of glorified women. The first to take compassion on him is the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom St. Bernard says:

Not only thy benignity gives succour  
 To him who asketh it; but oftentimes  
 Forerunneth of its own accord the asking.  
 In thee compassion is, in thee is pity, etc.<sup>3</sup>

The Blessed Virgin then symbolizes pity, or, in theological phrase, prevenient grace. Lucia, as her name implies, signifies enlightening grace. At Mary's request she *enlightens* Beatrice regarding the desperate plight of her lover, and, apparently of her own motion, transports Dante from the Flowery Valley of court life to the gate of penitence, as to the situation of which she *enlightens* Virgil. It is to Beatrice, however, that

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." ix, 55-63.

<sup>2</sup> "Inf." ii, 98.

<sup>3</sup> "Par." xxxiii, 16-18.

Dante is indebted most, or most directly, and in Paradise his last words to her are:

O Lady, thou in whom my hope is strong,  
 And who for my salvation didst endure  
 In Hell to leave the imprint of thy feet,  
 Of whatsoever things I have beheld,  
 As coming from thy power and thy goodness  
 I recognize the virtue and the grace.  
 Thou from a slave hast brought me unto freedom,  
 By all those ways, by all the expedients,  
 Whereby thou hadst the power of doing it.  
 Preserve towards me thy magnificence,  
 So that this soul of mine, which thou hast healed,  
 Pleasing to thee be loosened from the body.<sup>1</sup>

In Canto XXX of the "Purgatorio"<sup>2</sup> Beatrice states that, among other expedients, she recalled Dante by means of dreams, but he would not hearken, and then it was that, as a last desperate resource, she visited Hell-gate and, with abundance of tears, besought Virgil to show her erring lover the "people of perdition" in the manner described in Canto II of the "Inferno." Beatrice is revelation, but there were certain aspects of truth that she could not or would not reveal, more particularly the horrors of hell, though she realized that the spectacle was necessary for Dante as a medicine—as a preliminary to sound conversion. He was to be saved as by fire. The conviction was to be burnt into his mind that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; and in the realms of Hell and Purgatory human spirits appear in all their nakedness, without the trappings of rank and office, which are apt to cover a multitude of sins.

<sup>1</sup> "Par." xxxi, 79-90.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 134-41.

Virtue can be acquired by the aid of reason and philosophy, and therefore Virgil serves as guide not only through the circles of Hell, but through the unfamiliar circles of Purgatory. He, however, confesses his limitations, and refers to Beatrice as an authority on a more advanced and difficult branch of learning than that of which he is the master.

Verily, in so deep a questioning  
 Do not decide, unless she tell it thee,  
 Who light 'twixt truth and intellect will be.  
 I know not if thou understand; I speak  
 Of Beatrice . . .<sup>1</sup>

What reason seeth here,  
 Myself can tell thee; beyond that await  
 For Beatrice, since 'tis a work of faith.<sup>2</sup>

When at length Beatrice becomes Dante's guide, she reveals the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven with a profundity of wisdom which more than justifies the compliment paid her in the "*Vita Nuova*," in which Dante had spoken of her "noble understanding." She fearlessly enters the domain of casuistry reserved for her, and demonstrates the superiority of Christian ethics to those crude ideas of religion and duty, owned by Jew and Pagan alike, which sanctioned human sacrifice for the accomplishment of an unwise vow. Beatrice is inflexibly orthodox. In terms that recall the passage of the "*De Monarchia*," which we have cited as expressing sentiments fundamental to the "*Commedia*," she insists on obedience to the

<sup>1</sup> "*Purg.*" vi, 43-7.

<sup>2</sup> "*Purg.*" xviii, 46-8.

Church in spiritual matters, and the adequacy of Holy Scripture and ecclesiastical authority as rules of conduct, and admits no right of private judgement.

Christians, be ye more serious in your movements;  
 Be ye not like a feather at each wind,  
 And think not every water washes you.  
 Ye have the Old and the New Testament,  
 And the Pastor of the Church, who guideth you.  
 Let this suffice you unto your salvation.  
 If evil appetite cry aught else to you,  
 Be ye as men, and not as silly sheep,  
 So that the Jew among you may not mock you.  
 Be ye not as the lamb that doth abandon  
 Its mother's milk, and frolicsome and simple  
 Combats at its own pleasure with itself.<sup>1</sup>

Dante states in the "De Monarchia" that philosophy will lead to temporal happiness if its precepts are followed by the practice of moral and intellectual virtues, while eternal happiness demands the exercise of the Christian graces, Faith, Hope, and Charity. In the pageant of the Church Militant the cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance dance on the *left* hand of the car,<sup>2</sup> and it will be noted that they follow the measure of one of them who has three eyes. This is Prudence, as looking at the past, present, and future; she represents the intellectual virtues. On the *right* hand of the car dance the three evangelical virtues, Charity, Hope, and Faith. Charity takes precedence in conformity with St. Paul's declaration: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor-

<sup>1</sup> "Par." v, 73-84.

<sup>2</sup> "Purg." xxix, 121-32.



inthians, xiii, 13). When Dante has been plunged in the waters of Lethe, he is brought into the company of the beautiful four, who say to him:

We here are nymphs, and in the Heaven are stars;<sup>1</sup>  
 Ere Beatrice descended to the world,  
 We as her *handmaids* were appointed her.  
 We'll lead thee to her eyes; but for the pleasant  
 Light that within them is, shall sharpen thine  
 The three beyond, who more profoundly look.

Thereupon

Themselves revealing *of the highest rank*  
 In bearing, did the other three advance,  
 Singing to their angelic saraband.  
 "Turn, Beatrice, O turn thy holy eyes,"  
 Such was their song, "unto thy faithful one,  
 Who has to see thee ta'en so many steps.  
 In grace do us the grace that thou unveil  
 Thy face to him, so that he may discern  
 The second beauty which thou dost conceal."<sup>2</sup>

The Cardinal Virtues, it will be observed, wait upon Beatrice in the world; they have to do with the moral or Active Life of earth. The theological virtues, on the other hand, are equal to Revelation, which bears the same relation to them as does Prudence, the intellectual virtue, to the moral virtues, save that Prudence precedes and Revelation is preceded by the virtues that accompany them. Faith, Hope and Charity admit to the higher, the Contemplative Life of Heaven, Beatrice's "second beauty."

The distinction between the Active and the Contemplative Life is allegorized in various ways. First in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Purg." i, 23.

<sup>2</sup> "Purg." xxxi, 103-11; 130-8.

the contrast between Leah and Rachel. On the last stairway of Purgatory, at the entrance of the Earthly Paradise, Dante falls asleep and has a dream.

Youthful and beautiful in dreams methought  
 I saw a lady walking in a meadow,  
 Gathering flowers; and singing she was saying:  
 "Know whosoever may my name demand  
 That I am Leah, and go moving round  
 My beauteous hands to make myself a garland.  
 To please me at the mirror here I deck me,  
 But never does my sister Rachel leave  
 Her looking-glass, and sitteth all day long.  
 To see her beauteous eyes as eager is she,  
 As I am to adorn me with my hands;  
 Her, seeing, and me, doing satisfies."<sup>1</sup>

In the Earthly Paradise Dante encounters a lady named Matilda, presumably the Countess Matilda who left her property to the Church; she also is gathering flowers, not, however, for her personal adornment but out of pure delight in the beauties of creation. She cannot represent the Active Life, because that part has been assigned to Leah. It is further to be observed that the Terrestrial Paradise signifies the highest condition attainable upon earth. There is no question of *work*, in any disagreeable sense, for either Leah or Matilda.

The Good Supreme, sole in itself delighting,  
 Created man good, and this goodly place  
 Gave him as hansom of eternal peace.  
 By his default short while he sojourned here;  
 By his default to weeping and *to toil*  
 He changed his innocent laughter and *sweet play*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxvii, 97-108.

<sup>2</sup> "Purg." xxviii, 91-6.

Matilda typifies the Contemplative Life on earth, as is shown by the hint which she herself supplies in the single word *delectasti* taken from Psalm xcii, 4; and so she supersedes Virgil, as Dante's guide, when he quits the toils and sufferings of the seven cornices for the rest and happiness of the holy table-land.

Beatrice, like Rachel and all the highest spirits, resides in the Empyrean Heaven, where her employment is contemplation, but, being symbolical of Revelation, in which character she descends to the Church Militant, she is associated with the inner, just as Virgil is associated with the outer, activities of the soul. Her limit is defined by the object of her mission, which is Dante's salvation, and having brought him to the saintly host of the Church Triumphant, the White Rose which is Christ's Bride, she withdraws from him and resigns her office to St. Bernard. That "contemplator" conducts him to the end of all desires—the Beatific Vision. Authorities are not agreed concerning the precise date and duration of the mystic pilgrimage, but the particulars which Dante furnishes are consonant with a symbolical representation of his conversion. He enters Hell on the evening of Good Friday, reaches Purgatory at day-break on Holy Saturday, sleeps on the stairway of the Earthly Paradise, and on Easter Day, having drunk of the water of Eunöe, ascends to Heaven.



## EPILOGUE



## CHARACTERISTICS

### I. THE MAN

**B**OCCACCIO'S description of Dante—that of the outer man, his face and figure—is sufficiently arresting. “Our poet,” he writes, “was of middle height, and after attaining mature years, went somewhat stooping. His gait was grave and sedate. Always clothed in most becoming garments, his dress was suited to the ripeness of his years. His face was long, his nose aquiline, his eyes rather large than small, his jaw heavy, and his under lip prominent. His complexion was dark, and his hair and beard thick, black and crisp, and his countenance was always sad and thoughtful. . . . His manners, whether in public or at home, were wonderfully composed and restrained; and in all his ways he was more courteous and civil than anyone else.”

Existing portraits, for the most part, faithfully reproduce these traits. The most important are the fresco painting in the Bargello at Florence by Giotto, which represents the poet in his *vita nuova*; and the mask in the Uffizi of the same city, which shows us the Dante of travail. Besides these there is the portrait by Andrea Orcagna in the Capella Strozzi at the Church of Santa



Maria Novella, that by Andrea del Castagno in the Convent of Santa Apollonia, Florence, and the bronze in the Naples Museum. Orcagna's portrait depicts Dante in an attitude of prayer, and, singularly enough, the under lip, instead of projecting, is puckered in. But taking all five together, the effect is similar, and they all agree in depicting Dante as shaven.

Now Dante certainly seems to have worn a beard, as Beatrice makes it the subject of a reproach.<sup>1</sup> At the period shown in Giotto's likeness, he may not have done so, but the other portraits appear to be, in this respect, inaccurate. The truth probably is that his beard was removed after his death to enable the mask to be taken. Another point is worthy of a passing note. Boccaccio says that Dante's hair and beard were dark. We should draw a different conclusion from the poet's own words in the first Eclogue (l. 44), where he speaks of his locks as originally auburn, though then gray. The fashion of the countenance as a suggestion of character and temperament is most satisfying. Mr. Dirck sums up its expression in one epithet—Dantesque, which conveys a world of meaning to the initiated. For those less able to decipher its significance, Carlyle subjects the portrait of the prematurely old and broken "hero" to an eloquent analysis. "Looking at it," he says, "you cannot help inclining to think it genuine. A most touching face, perhaps of all faces that I know the most so. Lonely there, painted as on vacancy, with the simple laurel wound round it; the deathless sorrow and pain, the

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxxi, 62, 74.



known victory which is also deathless, significant of the whole history of Dante! I think it is the mournfullest face that ever was painted from reality; an altogether tragic, heart-affecting face. There is in it, as foundation of it, the softness, tenderness, gentle affection as of a child; but all this as if congealed into sharp contradiction, into abnegation, isolation, proud, hopeless pain. A soft ethereal soul looking out so stern, implacable, grim-trenchant, as if from imprisonment of thick-ribbed ice! Withal it is a silent pain too, a silent scornful one; the lip is curled in a kind of godlike disdain of the thing that is eating out his heart—as if it were withal a mean insignificant thing, as if he whom it had power to torture were greater than it. The face of one wholly in protest and lifelong unsundering struggle against the world. Affection all converted into indignation, slow, equable, silent, like that of a god”!

But Dante did not appear like a god to his Italian countrymen. In the “Convivio” he makes no secret of the fact that wherever he showed himself in person, his reputation suffered. The reason lay in his pecuniary straits. Boccaccio, though he survived to deify the poet, may have remembered him—certainly, there were still alive those who had so marked him—as a poverty-stricken wanderer, when that eagle face, in which the pride of genius, the irony of disappointment, and the stubbornness of invincible resolution, were blended in masculine strength and sternness, failed to affect observers distracted by its accessories—the sordid raiment, the minished stature, the frail

and feeble frame. Too often, as Dante complains, accidents obscure essence, and the livery of adversity was apt to libel not only the intellectual grandeur of the man, but the lineaments of its index. It would indeed be passing strange, if a character like that of Dante, shining so clear and distinct in his writings, left no trace on his physiognomy, for in most persons the features preserve the reflection of emotions, habits, and circumstances. Which brings us to a notable quality of the poet that cannot be termed a virtue, and may be justly criticised as a fault. We allude to his pride. Dante has nothing of the large and genial humanity of Shakespeare. With a candour incapable of concealment in matters of general import, he proclaims that the mass of men are no better than children, are shallow and superficial. The worst are nothing but brute beasts, and the worst are not few. He does not stickle to denounce whole communities as degraded to that abject level, and the Tuscans, as whom he knows best, incur his keenest censure. So horrible are his recollections of the province that, even in Hell—fresh to its terrors—he shrinks from naming the Arno, and the people whose lands it laves. For them also he has no proper names. He once spoke of them as Casentines, Aretines, Florentines, and Pisans; now they are swine, curs, wolves, and foxes!

The women of Florence are morally worthless, and only for one does Dante find a kind word—Nella, the “little widow” of his ancient acquaintance, Forese Donati. For the mental capacity of the sex his contempt is supreme. Does he refer to matters compre-

hensible to the meanest intelligence? He shows their simplicity by adding, "as is manifest even to women." And when he will be thorough and emphatic, he has recourse to the Latin diminutive *mulierculae*,<sup>1</sup> and brackets women with children as creatures of imperfect and undeveloped understanding. It is perhaps significant that he bans their prattle from his tragic style, but here we must remember that the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" is a severely practical treatise, and Dante, in his jealous care for purity of diction, was bound to be as severe on the boudoir as on the nursery and the street. This general disdain is, of course, consistent with profound veneration for noble men and for noble women—for St. Francis and the Emperor Henry, for Beatrice and Piccarda, and the "great Constance." But we are dealing now with his attitude towards common humanity, and this, when it was not cold and indifferent, was scornful, censorious, and proud. Dante seems to have betrayed his sentiments by an habitual reserve towards his intellectual inferiors. "This Dante," says Villani, "from his knowledge was somewhat presumptuous, harsh and disdainful, like an ungracious philosopher; he scarcely deigned to converse with laymen." Boccaccio, on the other hand, depicts the poet as a charming companion; he will have us think of him as a perfect gentleman. Which of these accounts is correct? It is probable that there is in both some measure of truth and exaggeration. Guelf though he was, we cannot accuse Villani of prejudice, and as Boccaccio's bio-

<sup>1</sup> Epistle x, § 10.

graphy is confessedly a panegyric, we may be forgiven for doubting that Dante was invariably bland, that he never lost his temper. We hazard the conjecture that he appeared to his chosen associates in another light than to his enemies and strangers. It must have been so; it is the case with all.

Dante was an aristocrat. The class of readers desiderated for the "Convivio," and doubtless for the "Commedia" as well, was socially of high rank—princes, barons, cavaliers, and other gentlefolk. His insistence on nobility as a moral quality must not be taken as evidence of a democratic tendency; it was dictated by a philosophic motive, which, to say the least, was not inimical to hereditary distinction. A degenerate nobleman was as displeasing to him as *bassa gente*, and more, because such an one has so many incentives to fine conduct that the child of the gutter must necessarily lack. So Dante, far from sparing, flings taunt after taunt at nobles noble only in name—it matters not whether they be great German potentates too craven or remiss to possess themselves of the garden of the empire or little Florentine cavaliers who waste their substance in riotous living. Dante's aristocratic leanings are shown in his definition of literary Italian as *aulic* and *curial*. A court is to him a centre of culture and refinement. It is in such, not in the universities, blindly attached to Latin, that the Sweet New Style is most at home and will win the fairest welcome. Born a Guelf, by a law of his nature Dante gravitated to Ghibellinism, and when, in just wrath, he separated himself from the

junta of self-seeking conspirators, he adhered to the principle that served them as a pretext and a war-cry. He realized that, in practice, Ghibellinism implied merely the substitution of oligarchy for popular government, and so, inevitably, he became "a party by himself,"—a pure and undefiled Imperialist, in whose eyes the restoration of the Empire to its pristine glory and power was the paramount question overshadowing and comprehending all others. Of all his kindred, Cacciaguida alone occupies a conspicuous and honoured place in the "Commedia," and naturally so, since the memory of the valiant old knight, who had perished in the service of faith and Empire, was to Dante a priceless possession, especially as the family of Alighieri had been absorbed into the commune of Florence and its more ignoble faction. Hence he exclaims:

O thou, our poor nobility of blood,  
If thou dost make the people glory in thee,  
Down here where our affection languishes,  
A marvellous thing it ne'er can be to me,  
For there where appetite is not perverted,  
I say in Heaven, of thee I made my boast!  
Truly thou art a cloak that quickly shortens,  
So that unless we piece thee day by day  
Time goeth round about thee with his shears!<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE ARTIST

Dante possessed two qualifications essential to a poet—the hearing ear and the seeing eye. He may or may not have been an executant musician, but, be-

<sup>1</sup> "Par." xvi, 1-9.

yond all question, he had a delicate sense, and, indeed, an uncontrollable sympathy for the magic of tone. When Casella sings, he listens rapt, and, as he writes, the well interpreted air still haunts him. Coleridge said in his later days that he could compose as good verse as ever if he could be "within the *ad libitum* hearing of good music"; and so strait is the affinity betwixt cadence and rhythm, that an accomplished versifier without an ear for music—even if some caprice of nature has denied the power to demonstrate it—is inconceivable. This would have been axiomatic to Dante, who had studied the mutual relations of the arts, and was aware that the principles of versification, as transmitted by his Troubadour predecessors, were based on those of music. True, verse might exist apart from melody, but originally it had been created for it, as woman for man. By verse we mean, of course, not poetry, but poetical form. A composition like the "Commedia," by reason of its formidable bulk, might seem more fit for reading or recitation than chanting, but the traditions of mediæval minstrelsy took no account of the length of a poem, the delivery of which might, in fact, be lubricated by vocal or instrumental variations; and the Sacred Poem, with its alternate rhyming, which may be compared to the surge and recess of the waves, seems attempered to some cosmic plain song, of which the stately rhythm is a perpetual echo.

In the curriculum of the schools poetry was not an art in itself—it was a branch of rhetoric; and Dante was a master of dramatic and declamatory effect. We

may adduce as an example his use of iteration as a means of impressing his audience. There is something incomparably weird in the commencement of Canto III of the "Inferno"—a quality much enhanced by the fact that the inscription over Hell-gate comes unannounced by any previous intimation of its reference. For, be it observed, Dante up to that point has not stated—he has hardly so much as hinted—that he is bound for the *nether* regions. Thus the opening of the canto has a calculated abruptness, and the triple formula falls on the ear with the sudden clangour of a funeral bell. But neither the inscription nor the threeness ends with the first significant sentence. The notice is expanded into a nicely adjusted syllogism, of which ll. 1-3 constitute the major premiss, ll. 4-8 the minor, and—with wonderful art—the single l. 9 the dooming conclusion. Thus does Dante impress dialectic into the service of rhetoric, and both into the service of poetry.

An instance of ingemination nearly as remarkable occurs in Canto XII of the "Purgatorio." There four *terzines*, beginning with the words "I saw," are succeeded by four beginning with the interjection "O," and these again by four beginning with the word "Displayed." The final *terzine* of the passage—which is descriptive of sculptures, concerning which Dante has to say :

Dead seemed the dead, the living seemed alive;  
Better than I saw not who saw the truth,  
All that I trod upon while bowed I went——<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ll. 67-9.



the final *terzine* resumes the first commencement "I saw"; the second line of it begins with "O," and the third with "Displayed," the principle of triplicity being applied to the commencements of the lines in a manner reminiscent of the preceding three sets of four *terzines*. This may smack of artificiality, but Dante did not abuse or pervert his craft. He had an instinctive sense of the appropriate artifice, as of the unavoidable word, the predestined metre; and that sense was his master. The rhetorical force of this ecstatic appreciation, its cumulative eloquence, its valedictory close, must be realized by all who are not too dull to be interested in the *nuances* of literary art. Were we upon a musical theme proper, we should say that Dante works up a crescendo, maintains a strenuous fortissimo, and concludes with a diminuendo.

Dante, then, undoubtedly had the hearing ear, but he had not less certainly the seeing eye. In reality he sees vastly more than reaches the surface of the poem, which is notable, amongst other things, for its allusiveness. From beginning to end Dante touches upon persons and events, some historical, others well known at the time that would since have passed into oblivion but for the industry of commentators to whom it has been a sacred duty to elucidate every reference. This sort of *parola oscura*, this assumption of knowledge or disregard of ignorance concerning facts, with all or most of which only a few could have been conversant—and, with the effluxion of time, the number must have gone on diminishing—imparts to the poetry a



lofty, solemn, oracular effect, and creates an impression of illimitable resource. Dante will not cumber himself with details that can be gleaned from books or learned from the older people; he will not make more of ordinary human beings than their virtues or vices deserve. When an important personage appears on the scene, or the humour seizes, he is more liberal, but even then he takes a good deal for granted. It is his cue not to *tell* stories, but to *moralize* them. Hence the "Commedia" is extremely tiresome to those who will not condescend to a regular study of the work. Voltaire is impatient, Alphonse de Lamartine rebellious, chiefly, if not entirely, because the "Commedia" makes such immense demands on the attention, because it postulates special and extensive erudition. Lamartine, refusing to it the title of a vast and immortal epic poem, calls it "the Florentine gazette of posterity."

But if superfluity of riches, combined with a just conception of his function—not to mention material limits—induces him to hint, to outline, to practise a poetical shorthand, Dante can be definite and pictorial, where those qualities seem needed; and though men and women flit across his stage, and we are told very little about them, the backgrounds of Hell and Purgatory, and the peculiarities of monsters and penalties, have not a shadow of vagueness. The phrase "I saw," a sort of keynote, occurs again and again, and Dante is not content with himself seeing; he takes care that his readers also shall see, as far as their faculties and finite human language permit. The

"Commedia" is not only a vision, but a vision of extraordinary vividness. In the thirty-first canto of the "Paradiso" Dante compares himself to a pilgrim

who delighteth him  
In gazing round the temple of his vow,  
And hopes some day to retell how it was;<sup>1</sup>

and the exactness with which everything cognizable in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise is recorded suggests the intelligent, persevering curiosity of a traveller in a strange land resolved to endure all hardships, to spare no effort, so he may cram his note-books with a harvest of information for his grateful compatriots. In his "Modern Painters" Ruskin contrasts Dante with Milton in this particular, awarding the palm to the former. He says:

"Milton's effort in all that he tells us of his Inferno is to make it indefinite; Dante's to make it definite. Both indeed describe it as entered through gates; but within the gate, all is wild and fenceless with Milton, having indeed its four rivers—the last vestige of the mediaeval tradition—but rivers which flow through a waste of mountain and moorland, and by 'many a frozen, many a fiery alp.' But Dante's Inferno is accurately separated in circles drawn with well-pointed compasses; mapped and properly surveyed in every direction, trenched in a thoroughly good style of engineering from depth to depth, and divided in the 'accurate middle' (*drizzo mezzo*) of its deepest abyss into a concentric series of ten moats

<sup>1</sup> ll. 43-5.

and embankments. . . . Now whether this be what we moderns call 'good taste' or not, I do not mean just now to enquire—Dante having nothing to do with taste, but with the facts of what he had seen; only so far as the imaginative faculty of the two poets is concerned, note that Milton's vagueness is not the sign of imagination, but of its absence, so far as it is significative in the matter. For it does not follow because Milton did not map out his *Inferno* as Dante did that he could not have done so if he had chosen; only it was the easier and less imaginative process to leave it vague than to define it. Imagination is always the seeing and asserting faculty; that which obscures or conceals may be judgment or feeling, but not invention. The invention, whether good or bad, is in the accurate engineering, not in the fog and uncertainty."

Hell is a prison-fortress, the mightiest ever constructed, and it is perhaps worthy of remark that the "war prison" on Dartmoor, built for the reception of French and American captives, was planned on similar lines to Dante's *Inferno*—that is, in concentric circles, as affording the greatest security against escape.

If, in his first cantica, Dante shows himself a competent engineer, in his "*Purgatorio*" he discovers a taste for architecture and the plastic arts. For ramparts there are cornices, and Dante is enthralled with the wondrousness of the "visible language," the divinely-wrought imagery impressed on wall and pavement. He is seeing, always seeing, and the habit of observation manifested in the eternal kingdoms he had acquired on earth, having doubtless spent long

hours of contemplation before masterpieces of human cunning in his travels from court to court, from city to city. The Valley of Princes, and, still more, the Earthly Paradise, invite him to try his skill in landscape, to make Edens; and, responding to the call, he paints scenes of incomparable peace and beauty. At no point of his journey is he otherwise than deliberate, but he seems exceptionally inclined to dally amid the bowers of the Earthly Paradise, which he traverses with lingering pace that he may drink in all its ravishment.

I left the bank  
Taking the level champaign *slowly, slowly*,  
Over the soil that everywhere breathes fragrance.<sup>1</sup>

As he listens to the burden of the wind-kiss'd leaves accompanying the strains of the jubilant song-birds, his thoughts recur to the pine forest on the shore of Chiassi with its Æolian melody. At length he reaches a stream, whose "brown, brown current" flows beneath a shade perpetual, that neither sun nor moon can penetrate with its ray. It is the River Lethe, and the shade symbolizes the darkness of forgetfulness. It is a real stream, however, for Dante notes that

the little waves  
Bent down the grass that on its margin sprang.<sup>2</sup>

In depicting Heaven Dante has a far more difficult task, and he knows it. St. Paul had written: "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared

<sup>1</sup> "Purg." xxviii, 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> "Purg." xxviii, 26-7.

for them that love him, but God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> This text, though relating apparently to the moral rather than the essential Heaven, seems to have been constantly present to Dante’s mind. Ever and anon he frankly confesses his inability to cope with the ineffable. The proem of the “Paradiso,” in which he concedes not so much his personal inadequacy, but the inadequacy of all human and angelic agency, is the precursor of a number of passages repeating this sentiment. For example:

Representing Paradise,  
The sacred poem must perforce leap over,  
Even as a man who finds his way cut off;  
And whoso thinketh of the ponderous theme,  
And of the mortal shoulder laden with it,  
Should blame it not, if under this it tremble.  
It is no passage for a little boat  
This which goes cleaving the audacious prow,  
Nor for a pilot that would spare himself.<sup>2</sup>

Again:

I, though I call on genius, art, and practice,  
Cannot so tell that it could be *imagined*:  
Believe one can, and let him long to see it.<sup>3</sup>

And, finally:

My sight, becoming purified,  
Was entering more and more into the ray  
Of the High Light, which of itself is true.  
From that time forward what I saw was greater  
Than our discourse, that to such vision yields,  
And yields the memory unto such excess.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. ii, 9.

<sup>2</sup> “Par.” xxiii, 61-9.

<sup>3</sup> “Par.” x, 43-5.

Even as he who seeth in a dream,  
And after dreaming the imprinted passion  
Remains, and to his mind the rest returns not,  
Even such am I, for almost utterly  
Ceases my vision, and distilleth yet  
Within my heart the sweetness born of it;  
Even thus the snow is in the sun unsealed,  
Even thus upon the wind in the light leaves  
Were the soothsayings of the Sibyl lost.<sup>1</sup>

Dante therefore elects to picture states rather than scenes of blessedness, a point brought out with some emphasis in the fourth canto of the "Paradiso" (ll. 27-39); and, as the lower heavens typify diverse conditions of happiness, Dante varies the atmosphere according to distinctions already expressed in the "Convivio." The transitions from one to the other are indicated mainly in this way, but there is nothing in the "Paradiso" to equal in picturesque description the beauties of the sunrise in the second canto of the "Purgatorio." Dante appears to have conceived of the stars as entirely different from the earth—lustrous spheres affording foothold for more lustrous spirits. When he reaches the Primum Mobile, and then the Empyrean, he has left behind him the last phases of matter, and the symbolism, much of it borrowed from the Apocalypse, can no longer be confounded with things of sense. All that he can tell us of Heaven is that it is a world of palpitating light flooded with unimaginable harmony; and, if he fails where failure is inevitable and conscious, he, at any rate, succeeds

<sup>1</sup> "Par." xxxiii, 52-65.

in conveying a sense of his own almost unendurable bliss, and the pure and elevated joys of the elect.

In the case of earthly objects Dante is extraordinarily accurate, especially when it is considered that he lived in an age when zoology and kindred sciences were neglected, and that, in certain instances, he was dependent on the reports of travellers and statements of ancient authors. These he could neither corroborate nor disprove, and therefore he was led astray, *e.g.* with regard to fiery adders. On the whole, however, Dante was as correct as might be anticipated from his singular and invariable fidelity to nature, though he had, at least, one superior. "As a naturalist," says Mr. Holbrook, "Frederick II surpassed Albert the German and Dante. On the other hand, Dante, as an artist, not only excels in the main all his contemporaries and forerunners, but outshines the best writers of antiquity. . . . What now is Dante's artistic attitude towards the lower animals? With a few exceptions their existence interests him only in so far as it furnishes him imagery to make us comprehend the actions of men, of devils, or of angels, or in so far as the animals furnish lessons for the guidance of man. He neither loves nor portrays them wholly for their own sake. Almost six centuries had passed when they found their first great literary interpreter in Leconte de Lisle. Yet Dante is the most accurate artistic observer of his time. His will to be right is obvious even in the smallest things, and see how he can blend science and poetry to make them one!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Dante and the Animal Kingdom," p. 8.



A great poet must possess not only a hearing ear and a seeing eye, but an understanding mind. Dante is the apostle of intellect. What Milman says of Dante's master, St. Thomas Aquinas, is equally applicable to Aquinas' greater pupil—that, with him, the perfection of man is the perfection of his intellect. The epithet that most befits him is a term he is fond of using; that epithet is "subtle." This explains his fine workmanship, his aptness for detail, but we were not thinking of that. From his earliest days he delighted in tracing out mysteries to their last analysis, and setting similar problems for others. He loved to be profound, to plumb the depths of being. "All genius," says Coleridge, "is metaphysical, because the ultimate end of genius is ideal, however it may be actualized by incidental and accidental circumstances." That is why Dante's heaven is intellectual—too much so for the majority of his readers, less eager than himself to know even as they are known.

Dante's science is largely false, and he made no important contribution to astronomy, or any of the abstruser branches of knowledge, but he thoroughly assimilated the systems of the great teachers, both ancient and modern, and conquered the technique of various arts, especially such as bore upon his own vocation as poet. Nor was it only the contents of books or the maxims of professors that rooted themselves in his memory and blossomed luxuriantly in his writings. He was deeply versed in the study of man—man in the abstract, and in the infinite diversities of



his nature; and thus of the "Commedia" he could say, as Juvenal did of his satires:

Quidquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas,  
Gaudia, discursus, nostri farrago libelli est.

Doubtless also he would have continued the quotation, launching it at his own generation:

Et quando uberior vitiorum copia? Quando  
Major avaritiæ patuit sinus?<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Holbrook's remark as to the perfect way in which Dante reconciles science and poetry conducts to the inquiry, What is poetry? A hearing ear, a seeing eye, and an understanding mind, though they are necessary conditions for the achievement of a work on the lines of the "Commedia," do not make a poet. A sense of melody, imagination, learning, insight—these are excellent gifts, but something is required to set them in motion, to maintain them in vital efficiency, to weld or fuse them into harmonious expression, and that something is feeling. Dante, it will be said, was ambitious; he yearned for posthumous fame as compensation for all the world had denied him. There was an incentive. We grant it, but ambition is feeling—it may be called a selfish emotion. Dante, however, had social emotions, love and hate, admiration and contempt, fear and fortitude, and had them in no common measure. Whatever sentiment possessed him asserted itself with all the strength of his passionate nature, and carried him to the bound. Yet his will was still

<sup>1</sup> "Sat." i, 85-8.

stronger, enabling him to recall his falcons of feeling, and compelling them to submit to the dictates of reason. Thus wrath becomes righteous indignation, and sensual love the holiest of longings; and the emotions are as intense in their last phase as in their first.

Dante's lyrical poems are very unlike his "Commedia"; they lack the objectivity of that most catholic of great poems; their interest is esoteric, and their language a cabala. But they bear witness to a furnace of emotional strength, and Dante needed it all to support a load of erudition which, in lesser men, would have paralysed originality, and smothered the creative faculty under an incubus of dead matter. But so great was Dante's intellectual force that he grew with each accretion of learning, and new facts or principles having been digested and absorbed into his spiritual organism, he was able to formulate ideas and sentiments in a thousand ways that would not have been open to a less richly cultivated understanding. The order, everywhere apparent in his writings, reflects the economy of his matchless mind, in which there was room for everything, and everything had its place; and yet he did not shrivel into a soulless pedant. He exalted scholarship; he transfigured it into an oriflamme of light and beauty. A scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, he brought forth out of his treasure things new and old. The adjustment, the harmony of his powers verges on the superhuman. Poetry has been defined as madness, but Dante, when most inspired, most bizarre, is invariably wise, invariably sane. He was deficient in

the somewhat banal, though saving, quality of humour; otherwise he must have realized the incongruity of his filial interview with Brunetto Latini, whom he pillories as a sodomite, enduring shameful and figurative torment. Dante's nearest approach to humour is to be found perhaps in his caricatures of devildom, but he does not mean us to laugh, to be amused. He desires to excite horror and loathing, and antipathy for what is ugly and deformed. Milton concedes some considerable relics of dignity and nobility to his fiends; not so Dante, and Ruskin holds Dante to be right. "I believe," he says, "that there is no test of greatness in periods, nations, or men, more sure than the development among them, or in them, of a noble grotesque; and no test of comparative smallness or limitation, of one kind or another, more sure than the absence of grotesque invention, or incapability of understanding it. I think that the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante; and in him the grotesque reaches at once the most distinct and the most noble development to which it was ever brought in the human mind."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Stones of Venice," ii, 207 (1881 ed.).

## INDEX

- ACHERON, 297.  
 Adam, 88, 134.  
 Adolphus, Emperor, 123, 234.  
 Aeneas, 279.  
 "Aeneid," 279, 289, 290, 296.  
 Africa, 124, 138.  
 Aimeric de Belenoi, 113.  
 Aimeric de Pegulhan, 113.  
 Alagia, 38.  
 Alberigo, Frate, 314.  
 Albert, Emperor, 20, 123, 234.  
 Albertus Magnus, 140, 247,  
     248, 367.  
 Albumazar, 247, 248.  
 Alcimus, 52.  
 Aldighiero, 6, 7, 230.  
 Alessandro da Romena, Count,  
     24, 34, 36, 47.  
 Alexander the Great, 35, 124,  
     125, 318.  
 Alfraganus, 185, 248, 256, 290,  
     297.  
 Algazel, 247.  
 Amadi, 229.  
 Amidei, The, 15.  
 Andrea del Castagno, 352.  
 Angels, 253-5.  
 "Anonimo Fiorentino," 25, 226.  
 Antaeus, 299, 313.  
 Antichthon, 252.  
 Antiochus, 52.  
 Apocalypse, 279, 366.  
 Aretines, The, 354.  
 Arezzo, 24, 47, 94.  
 Aristotle, 70, 246, 251, 252,  
     253, 289, 313, 321.  
 Arnaut, Daniel, 74, 75, 98, 102,  
     113.  
 Arno, River, 95.  
 Arrivabene, 72.  
 "Ars Poetica," 59.  
 Arthur, King, 91.  
 Asia, 138, 304.  
 Assyria, 133.  
 Atlas, Mt., 124.  
 Augustine, St., 135, 237,  
     246.  
 Augustus, Emperor, 131, 134.  
 Averroës, 247.  
 Avicenna, 247.  
 Avignon, 49, 329, 332.  
 Babel, Tower of, 88, 125.  
 Babylon, 125, 133.  
 Bacon, 13, 177.  
 Balbo, 5, 7, 27.  
 Barbi, Professor, 217.  
 Bargello, The, 351.  
 Bartoli, 175, 179, 180, 200,  
     208.

- Beatrice, 11, 12, 13, 50, 147,  
 154, 157-71, 188, 192, 193,  
 194-207, 225, 227, 228, 238,  
 343, 345, 347, 355.  
 Bellincione, 6.  
 Bembo, Bernardo, 28.  
 Benedict IX, Pope, 35.  
 Benvenuto da Imola, 14.  
 Bernard, St., 248, 289, 347.  
 Bertran de Born, 74, 98, 113.  
 Bianchi and Neri, 18, 19, 20,  
 21, 55.  
 Bischioni, 232.  
 Boccaccio, 5, 7, 16, 25, 30, 55,  
 86, 168, 171, 351, 353.  
 Boccaccio Adimari, 22.  
 Boethius, 288.  
 Bologna, 10, 24, 61, 63, 93,  
 95.  
 Bonaventure, St., 289.  
 Boniface, Pope, 19, 20, 22.  
 Boy-bishop, 86.  
 Brescia, Siege of, 27, 29, 49.  
 Brunetto Latini, 8, 9, 11, 78,  
 94, 114, 141, 289, 371.  
 Bruni, 24, 30, 31, 34, 36, 86.  
 Brutus, 319, 335.  
 Buonagiunta da Lucca, 77, 78,  
 94, 114, 225.  
 Buonconte, 25.  
 Buonconvento, 27.  
 Buondelmonti, 15.  
 Buti, 26.  
 Byron, 165.  
 Cacciaguida, 5, 6, 7, 357.  
 Caesar, 335.  
 Caetano di Sermoneta, 303.  
 Cairo, Old, 125.  
 Camicion de' Pazzi, 23, 326.  
 Campaldino, Battle of, 14.  
 Can Grande della Scala, 27, 56,  
 57, 62, 237, 277, 278, 280,  
 337-8.  
 Cancellieri, The, 18.  
 Cante de' Gabrielli, 21, 53.  
 Caorsines, 50.  
 Capella Strozzi, The, 351.  
 Capet, Hugh, 330.  
 Caprona, Siege of, 14.  
 Carducci, 149, 157.  
 Carlino de' Pazzi, 23.  
 Carlyle, 352.  
 Carpentras, 51.  
 Casella, 13, 75, 76, 358.  
 Casentines, The, 354.  
 Casentino, The, 24.  
 Cassini, 157.  
 Cassius, 335.  
 Castello della Pieve, The, 19.  
 Cato, 318.  
 Cavalcanti, Cavalcante, 13.  
 Cavalcanti, Guido, 12, 78, 94,  
 114, 153, 154, 155, 161, 162,  
 175, 184, 207, 264.  
 Cecco d'Ascoli, 30.  
 Cerberus, 325.  
 Cerchi, The, 18.  
 Charlemagne, 137, 338.  
 Charles of Valois, 233.  
 Charles II of Naples, 28.  
 Charles the Cripple, 17.  
 Chaytor, Mr., 106, 280.  
 Chiassi, 364.  
 Ciacco, 325.  
 Cialuffi, Lapa di, 19.  
 Cicero, 8, 9, 86, 125, 246, 247,  
 248, 251.

Cino Sinibuldi, of Pistoia, 13,  
32, 38, 78, 81, 92, 94, 98,  
114, 175, 197, 200, 209, 211.  
Clement, Pope, 28, 43, 49, 50,  
51, 53, 272.  
Clytie, 44, 198.  
Cocytus, 297.  
"Codex Ashburnham," 169;  
"Laurentian," 197; "Ric-  
cardian," 197.  
Coleridge, 174, 358, 368.  
Constance, 355.  
Council of Salzburg, 86.  
Council of the Capitadini, 17;  
of the Hundred Men, 17; of  
the Podesta, 17.  
Countess G. of Battifolle, 33, 47.  
Crete, 298, 327.  
Cumae, 295, 296, 297.  
Cunizza, 75.  
Curio, 48.  
  
D'Ancona, 157.  
Daniel, 135.  
Dante, *passim*.  
Dante, Antonia, daughter of, 16.  
—— Beatrice, daughter of, 16.  
—— Jacopo, son of, 16, 64.  
—— Pietro, son of, 16, 26, 169.  
Dante of Maiano, 77, 210.  
Davus, 71.  
"De Officiis," 317.  
Del Lungo, 14, 116, 230.  
Della Scala, Bartolommeo, 24.  
Demetrius, 152.  
Dicitori, 10, 73, 76, 81.  
Dictys and Dares, 241.  
Dino Compagni, 173.  
Dino Frescobaldi, 175.

Dionysius the Areopagite, 289.  
Dirck, Mr. 16.  
*Dolce stil nuovo*, 81, 82.  
Donati, Corso, 20, 21, 22, 41,  
221, 230.  
Donati, Forese, 6, 11, 220, 229-  
231, 354.  
Donati, Gemma, 16, 171, 172.  
Donati, Manetto, 16.  
Donna Bella, 9.  
Dukes of Bavaria, 15.  
  
Earthly Paradise, The, 234, 304,  
328-9, 364.  
Egypt, 125, 132.  
Elisei, 7.  
Eliseo, 6.  
Embassies, 17.  
Emerson, 3.  
Ennius, 125.  
"Ensenhamen," 75, 219.  
Epicureans, 310.  
Eunoe, River, 304.  
Eve, 88.  
  
Fabbro, Messer, 24.  
Fabricii, 222.  
Fabruzzo, 114.  
Farinata, 321.  
Federn, Herr, 7 (*note*), 11, 169.  
Ferrara, 6.  
Fiducio de' Milotti, 61.  
Flavio Biondi, 25, 90.  
Florence, 5, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16,  
17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 27, 31,  
48, 93-4, 164, 184, 202, 222,  
287, 304, 333, 353.  
Florentines, 9, 12, 14, 18, 46,  
212-3.

- Folquet de Marseille, 74.  
 Forlì, 25, 28.  
 Francesca da Rimini, 28.  
 Francis, St., 355.  
 Frangipani, The, 7.  
 Frate Ilario, Letter of, 40, 71, 273.  
 Fraticelli, 198.  
 Frederick Barbarossa, 46.  
 Frederick II, Emperor, 7, 46, 234, 261, 267.  
 Frederick of Aragon, 27, 46, 233.  
 Friar B., 35.  
 Furies, The, 324.  
 Gades, 290, 291, 294.  
 Galilee, 249, 250.  
 Gallo d'Agnelo, 114.  
 Ganges, 293, 294.  
 Gardner, Mr., 29, 32, 50, 54, 58, 307 (*note*).  
 Gascons, 50.  
 Gaspary, 26, 62, 85, 173.  
 Gentucca, 225.  
 Geraut de Borneuil, 74, 98.  
 Germany, 96.  
 Geryon, 298, 299, 313.  
 Gherardo da Camino, 324.  
 Gianni, Lapo, 13, 78, 94, 175, 208, 220.  
 Giano della Bella, 16-7.  
 Giotto, 14, 351-2.  
 Giovanna, 167, 207, 214-5.  
 Gladstone, 26.  
 Gorgon, 324.  
 Gotto of Mantua, 104, 114.  
 Guelfs and Ghibellines, 15, 117-118, 356-7.  
 Guido da Montefeltro, 317.  
 Guido delle Colonne, 95, 114.  
 Guido di Battifolle, 54.  
 Guido Ghisilieri, 22.  
 Guido Guinicelli, 79, 80, 81, 95, 114, 160, 218, 267.  
 Guido Novello, 28, 31, 61.  
 Guido Salvatico, 147.  
 Guilds, 17.  
 Guittone of Arezzo, 30, 77, 78, 81, 94, 99, 114, 210, 275.  
 Hadrian, Pope, 137.  
 Hazlitt, 174.  
 Heber, 88.  
 Hebrew, 88, 241.  
 Henry II, Emperor, 26, 27, 29, 41-3, 45, 49, 52, 121, 123, 273, 336-7, 355.  
 Hohenstaufen, House of, 15.  
 Holbrook, Mr., 337, 367, 369.  
 Holy See, The, 17.  
 Horace, 8, 59, 69, 70, 279.  
 Horatii and Curiatii, 124.  
 Hungarians, 89.  
 Ida, Mt., 298.  
 Ildebrandinus Paduanus, 114, 216.  
 "Iliad," 241.  
 Imbriani, 31.  
 Intellect, Active, 263; Possible, 263, 264.  
 Isaiah, 47, 267.  
 Jacob's Ladder, 307.  
 Jacopo da Lentini, 77.  
 Jason, 52.  
 Jeremiah, 51, 188.  
 Jerome, St., 249.

- Jerusalem, 51, 293, 295; the  
     Heavenly, 151.  
 Johannes Hispalensis, 248.  
 John of Montferrat, 87.  
 John, Pope, 50.  
 John the Baptist, 48.  
 Jowett, Rev. B., 242.  
 Judas Iscariot, 335.  
 Jugurtha, 221.  
 Justinian, 19.  
 Juvenal, 369.  
  
 Ken, Bishop, 325.  
  
 Lagia, Monna, 208, 215.  
 Lamartine, Alphonse de, 361.  
 "Lancelot du Lac," 92.  
 Latham, Mr., 44.  
 Leah, 346.  
 Leconte de Lisle, 367.  
 Leo, Pope, 137.  
 Leonardo Aretino, 90.  
 Lethe, River, 302, 304, 362.  
 "Leviathan," Hobbes's, 136.  
 Lisetta, 191, 216.  
 Livy, 124, 125.  
 Longfellow, 228.  
 Lucan, 48, 69, 279.  
 Lucca, 26, 94.  
 Lucia, 341; Lucia, St., 5, 341.  
 Lucifer, 295, 296, 297, 301, 313.  
 Luni, Bishop of, 24.  
 Lunigiana, The, 24, 40.  
  
 Maccabees, Books of, 52.  
 Macedonia, 133.  
 Magi, 136.  
 Malaspina, Gherardino, 52.  
 Malaspina, Moroello, 25, 33, 37,  
     38, 41, 49, 222.  
 Malaspina, The Marchesi, 24.  
 Malebolge, 300.  
 Mandeville, 125.  
 Manentessa, 23.  
 Mantua, 141.  
 Map, Walter, 92.  
 Marco Lombardo, 334.  
 Maremma, The, 35.  
 Marlborough, 22.  
 Marsilio Ficino, 33.  
 Mary, The Blessed Virgin, 341.  
 Matilda, The Countess, 20, 346.  
 Matteo d'Acquasparta, Cardinal,  
     16.  
 Maximilian of Bavaria, 33.  
 Messer Marchese, 25.  
 Michael Scot, 246.  
 Michael, The Archangel, 285.  
 Milton, 221, 245, 362-3, 371.  
 Mino Mocato, 114.  
 Minos, 298, 309.  
 Monte Aperto, Battle of, 30.  
 Monte Catini, Combat of, 61.  
 Moore, Dr., 138.  
 Moronto, 6.  
 "Morte Darthur," 91.  
 Moses, 136.  
  
 Naples Museum, The, 352.  
 Nella, 230, 354.  
 Nicholas of Ostia, Cardinal,  
     34-5.  
 Nicholas, Pope, 330.  
 Ninus, 124.  
 Niobe, 223.  
 Numa Pompilius, 96.  
  
 "Odyssey," 241.  
 Onesto, 114.



- Orcagna, Andrea, 251.  
 Orlandi, Guido, 208.  
 "Ormista," 124.  
 Orosius, 124.  
 Orsini, Cardinal, 52, 53.  
 Otto, of Friesing, Bishop, 125.  
 Ovid, 8, 39, 69, 269.  
  
 Pacific Ocean, 293.  
 Padua, 24.  
 Papacy, 49, 135-9.  
*Pargoletta*, 226-7.  
 Paris, 10.  
 Passerini, 36.  
 Paul, St., 131, 138, 284, 285, 286, 364.  
 Peile's "Primer of Philology," 239-40.  
 Peire Bremon Ricas Novas, 75.  
 Peire d'Alvernhe, 113.  
 Perini, Dino, 61.  
 Persia, 133.  
 Petrarch, 73, 74.  
 Pharaoh, 221.  
 Pharsalia, Battle of, 43; "Pharsalia," poem, 49.  
 Philip le Bel, 49, 51, 221, 329, 331.  
 Phlegethon, River, 297.  
 Piano, Fortress of, 23.  
 Piazza San Martino, Florence, 5.  
 Piccarda, 54, 355.  
 Pilate, 154.  
 Pisa, 94.  
 Pisans, The, 354.  
 Pistoia, 222.  
 Plato, 248.  
 Plumptre, Dean, 26, 63, 203.  
 Poggi, Leone, 9.  
  
 Porta San Piero, Florence, 5.  
 Portinari, Folco, 169.  
 Pratovecchio, 225.  
 Priors, Florentine, 18, 19.  
 Provençal poets. (*See* Troubadours.)  
 Provence, 73.  
 Psalms, 57, 58, 123.  
 Ptolemy, 186, 252.  
 Pythagoras, 246, 252.  
  
 Querini, Giovanni, 65.  
  
 Rachel, 346, 347.  
 Rajna, Signor Pio, 92, 156.  
 Ravenna, 28, 60.  
 Richard of St. Victor, 287.  
 Rinaldo d'Aquino, 114.  
 Robert of Naples, 27, 49, 61, 63, 273.  
 Romagna, The, 35.  
 Roman Empire, The, 45.  
 Roman People, The, 133.  
 Rome, 20, 49, 93, 96, 258, 329.  
 Rossetti, D. G., 29, 55, 230.  
 Rudolph, Emperor, 123, 234.  
 Rue du Fouarre, The, 26.  
 Ruskin, 189, 298, 316, 318, 319, 326, 362, 371.  
  
 Salterello, Lapo, 23, 173.  
 Salvatico, Guido, 25.  
 San Gemignano, Republic, 17.  
 San Gaudenzo, 23.  
 Santa Apollonia, Convent of, 352.  
 Santa Croce del Corvo, Convent of, 40.  
 Santa Maria Novella, Church of, 352.

Sarzana, 19.  
 Scarpetta degli Ordellaffi, 25.  
 Scartazzini, 31, 40, 171, 172,  
     273.  
 Scheffer-Boichorst, 26, 40.  
 Scythians, 124.  
 Semiramis, 124, 125.  
 Seneca, 96.  
 "Sermo Calliopeus," 203.  
 Serravalle, Battle of, 38, 49.  
 Shakespeare, 7, 69, 354.  
 Sicily, 17, 93.  
 Siena, 94.  
 Siger (or Sigier), 126.  
 Simone de' Bardi, 169.  
 Sordello, 9, 74-5, 189, 217.  
*Spiriti*, 175-7, 195-6.  
 St. James of Compostella, 13.  
 St. John's Gospel, 136.  
 St. Luke's Gospel, 187, 188.  
 St. Mark's Gospel, 249, 250.  
 St. Matthew's Gospel, 136, 249,  
     250.  
 Statius, 69.  
 Styx, River, 297.  
  
 Tennyson, 291.  
 Thibaut of Navarre, 113.  
 Thomas Aquinas, St., 246, 248,  
     249, 368.  
 Tiber, River, 304.  
 "Timæus," 248.  
 Todeschini, 23.  
 Toynbee, Dr. Paget, 41, 92,  
     125, 140.  
 "Trésor," 140.  
 Troubadours, 20, 74, 85.

Troya, 36.  
 Tuscans, The, 354.  
 Tuscany, 20, 35, 94, 95.  
  
 Ubaldini, Ugolino di, 23.  
 Uguccone da Pisa, 44, 250,  
     251.  
 Uguccone della Faggiuola, 26,  
     40, 61.  
 Ulysses, 291-3.  
 "Ulysses," poem, 291.  
 Usages, 187.  
  
 Val di Magra, 222.  
 Valley of Princes, 264, 304, 308,  
     325-6.  
 Venice, 28.  
 Verona, 24, 27, 141.  
 Veronica, The, 149, 150, 164.  
 Vesoges, 124.  
 Via di San Procolo, 28.  
 Villani, 4, 7, 8, 20, 22, 25, 49,  
     86, 150, 355.  
 Vincent of Beauvais, 140.  
 Virgil, 8, 69, 70, 279, 289, 290,  
     339.  
 Virgilio, Giovanni del, 60, 61,  
     62, 63, 64, 70, 273.  
 Vision of Frate Alberico, 286.  
 Vision of Walkelin, 286.  
 Vitelli, Prof., 92.  
 Voltaire, 361.  
 Voyage of St. Brandan, 286.  
  
 War prison, Dartmoor, 363.  
 Witte, 5, 35, 121, 122, 157, 231,  
     232, 272, 313.

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